

# A Good Courage

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The Kingdom of Yahweh is a fictional commune. The religion on which it is based, as created by the character Brother Daniel and recorded in Daniel's Book, draws names and references from literature of the Old Testament. There is no other connection to the beliefs or practices of any religious faith.

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# Chapter

# 1

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As the adults sang, Ty stood very still, feeling the warm May sunlight on his shoulders, aware of the rough cloth of his new homespun shirt and the strange sensation of wide-legged trousers, a drawstring tight around his waist. He glanced sideways at his mother, standing as still as he was, her narrow shoulders back, her head held high. The sun gleamed on her long, straight hair, striking golden highlights in the soft brown. There were a few gray strands there somewhere—she’d found them last winter and moaned for days—but he’d never noticed them. Jasmine’s hair was definitely her strongest asset, especially in the sun. *Jordana’s hair*; he corrected himself.

In a few minutes this Renaming would be over, and “Jasmine” would be gone into the land of abandoned names forever, with all the other names his mother had used. For a long time she’d been Faith, though he didn’t remember that one. Then she’d been Eowin, the first he’d learned. After that she’d been Jane, then Lucy, then Sunshadow, then, for a few months, Jasmine. Sunshadow had lasted longest, except for the seventeen years of her first name, Martha Lynn. But that one didn’t count, she’d explained when he discovered it, because that one had been chosen for her. Of course,

Jordana had been chosen for her, too, but she'd agreed to it, so that was different.

The singing stopped, and Brother Daniel, in his long blue-dyed homespun robe, strode forward from the line of men and women along the creek bank. He stopped a few feet in front of the two of them and held both arms out as if he planned to hug them. *Like a bear*, Ty thought again. Ever since he'd first seen Brother Daniel on television, he'd thought of him as the Bear. Big like a bear he was, and hairy like a bear, with his full white beard and hair curling to his shoulders. But not frightening. He seemed always ready to break into a twinkling grin so that he might be a massive teddy bear except for his astonishing eyes. Bright. Sharp. Piercing.

“Yahweh, hear us,” Brother Daniel said, and his deep voice seemed to reach up through the newly leafed trees on the other side of the creek to the clear blue of the morning sky. “These, thy servants, wish to be admitted to thy holy Kingdom.”

*Not exactly true*, Ty thought. Then: *What the heck. One of us does*. He glanced at his mother again. She was smiling that smile she got when she was more than happy, when she was turned on, hooked into something, connected. Ty couldn't help smiling, too. Times like this he could be sure his mother was okay. Times like this he didn't have to worry at all.

“In covenant thereof,” Brother Daniel boomed, “they wish to take names suitable to servants of the One God. They wish to renounce their devil names and begin anew.”

Ty kept his mouth shut. He didn't let even a flicker of his eyelid betray the truth: He was renouncing nothing. His name had nothing to do with the devil. Tie-Dye Rainey was the whole thing, though he usually used just Ty because there

weren't so many questions that way. It was his own name. It was more than that. It was *him*. Always had been, always would be. No way he was going to become Tobias. Not for Brother Daniel, not even for Jasmine. *Jordana*. That didn't mean he couldn't go through the ceremony, of course. Whatever the Bear did or said, Ty was Ty. Period.

"Jasmine thou wast," Brother Daniel went on, taking a step forward. "Jordana thou art."

"Jordana thou art," the others said.

Brother Daniel put one hand on Jasmine's head and raised the other toward the sky. "Jasmine, devil child, is dead."

"Jasmine is dead," the others echoed.

"Jordana, True Servant of the Kingdom, lives."

"Jordana lives!"

Now Brother Daniel turned to Ty. The whole process was repeated.

"Tie-Dye, devil child, is dead."

"Tie-Dye is dead."

*Poof!* Ty thought. He wondered how they'd prove it. They sure couldn't do an autopsy. Maybe there'd be a death certificate to go along with the birth certificate he kept in an envelope in the bottom of his backpack. *Proof. Poof proof.*

"Tobias, child-servant of the Kingdom, lives," Brother Daniel was saying, his huge hand heavy on Ty's head. Children were not equal in Yahweh's sight, he'd explained when they first came to the Kingdom, not full members until their Pledging. Children couldn't be True Servants.

"Tobias lives!"

*Too bad it isn't real*, Ty thought, smiling now to show the adults how glad he was to have become Tobias, child-servant of the Kingdom. If this guy Tobias really could be called into existence with words and hymns in a field by a creek, there'd be two of them. Ty and Tobias. Tobias and Ty. Friends. Together always, no matter where Jordana took them.

The singing began again. Another hymn he'd never heard. The tune was familiar, but the words weren't. Probably a special Kingdom hymn. In the two weeks they'd been here, he'd noticed that the Kingdom did pretty nearly everything in some special Kingdom way. His mother—*Jordana*, he repeated to himself in his head, trying to make it seem normal and right—was singing along, now that she was a True Servant. She must have learned the words in the meetings she'd been going to in the evenings while he'd done dishes with Ezekiel, Zillah, and Samarah. He wasn't supposed to sing. Children didn't sing in the Kingdom, not until after their Pledging. Ty didn't know much about that yet, except that it happened when you turned sixteen. Kind of like getting a driver's license, he supposed. He didn't care. That was more than a year away, and he and Jasmine—*Jordana*—would be someplace else by then. Florida, he hoped. They'd been on their way to a commune there when they'd seen that spot about Brother Daniel on TV. Ty had been looking forward to Florida, to palm trees and pelicans, dolphins and waves. When the Kingdom turned sour, he would put in his bid for that Florida place again.

The other kids weren't here at the Renaming. Child-servants didn't attend services. If it weren't for having to kill off Tie-Dye and give birth to Tobias, he wouldn't be here either. He'd be out in the fields with the rest of them. Spring was a busy time, Ezekiel had told him. Ty didn't mind field work. He'd done some nearly every place he'd lived since

he was six or seven years old. And as soon as he got to know the other kids better, and they got to know him better, the Kingdom promised to be a pretty good place to be for a while. At least there were plenty of kids, not like some places, not like that last one, the awful Urban Community, where he'd been the only person under thirty. And a couple of the girls here were really good-looking, if you weren't put off by the overalls and homespun shirts. Names were weird here, but that was nothing new. Ezekiel was no worse than Moonman, the name of his best friend at the Home Place, or Polaris, Moonman's father.

Ty shifted from one bare foot to the other and wished he hadn't thought about Polaris and Moonman. One thing he'd learned was never to look back, especially to good things. It didn't accomplish anything except to make you feel rotten. He tried listening to the hymn that was going on and on, verse after verse, but it was just more about Yahweh and true names and driving out the devil. He looked across the creek to the wooded hill. At the top, he knew, were the barns. The Kingdom had two mules. And rabbits. Lots of rabbits. Goats, too. Think about what was good in the new place; that was the way to get over the rotten feeling. No matter what a place was like, there was always something good about it. *Even that lousy motel had TV with free HBO.* As soon as the Renaming was over, he'd run up to the barn and visit the mules. Maybe he'd brush them down. Or maybe he'd pick up a baby rabbit and hold it against his cheek.

“Tobias, come with me.”

Ty looked up. The others were still singing, but the tall, rangy young man whose name was Jeremiah had left his place at the end of the line and was standing before him.

“Time to join the other boys,” Jeremiah said and smiled. “Your part of the Renaming is over.”

Ty turned to his mother, but Brother Daniel had taken her hand and was leading her down to join the other adults at the creek bank. She'd be fine without him, Ty knew. This was the good time. It was a beginning, and beginnings were always good. After those terrible weeks in the motel, his mother was in love with life again. A True Servant of the Kingdom of Yahweh. He nodded. "Lead on," he said.

"Yea, verily," Jeremiah said, grinning.

They walked the path along the creek back toward the main cluster of buildings, Jeremiah, in his white homespun robe and sandals, leading, Ty having to hurry to keep up with Jeremiah's long stride. Jeremiah's wavy dark brown hair, pulled back and tied with a bit of string, hung halfway down his back. His beard and mustache were thick and a lighter color, almost as if they'd been grown by somebody else. When Ty had first met him, he'd thought the beard was fake, that maybe he couldn't grow one, and because of the Kingdom rule that men had to wear full beards, he'd pasted one on. But it was real. Jeremiah had explained that lots of men's beards didn't really match their hair. Nobody else in the Kingdom was like that, but that didn't mean anything. "The Kingdom isn't the whole world, no matter what some people would have you think," Jeremiah had said with a wink. Of the adults Ty had met here so far, Jeremiah was the only one who talked to him like a regular person. The rest barely talked to kids at all, and when they did, they used a lot of stiff phrases and words Ty had come to think of as Bear talk because Brother Daniel used them.

"You'll want to change into jeans," Jeremiah said as they approached the low frame building that was the boys' quarters. "You moved in here this morning, didn't you?"

Ty nodded. During the two weeks he and his mother had been mere visitors, they'd been able to stay together in



a cabin reserved for guests. But once they'd been accepted as members, they couldn't stay together anymore. The only children allowed to live with their parents were the ones under the age of five. On their fifth birthdays they went to live in one of the two children's buildings, where they stayed until their Pledging. Adults lived in the men's building or the women's building or, if they were married, in rooms in the huge, rambling farmhouse that also contained the kitchen, dining hall, offices, and small apartments for Brother Daniel and Benjamin, his son.

Before the Renaming Ty had brought his belongings to the boys' quarters, where he'd been given a footlocker and a cot and a couple of hooks on the wall to hang clothes. He'd also been given two homespun shirts, to replace the T-shirts that he wouldn't be allowed to wear here, and the homespun trousers for wearing to dinner and special occasions like the Renaming. He'd be allowed to wear his own jeans, but no shorts or cutoffs. When he outgrew his jeans, he'd have to wear overalls instead. Everybody wore them during working hours. The Kingdom was very big on conformity.

"I'll change, too, and meet you back here in five minutes. Can you imagine hoeing in a robe?"

"Is that what we're doing today?"

"Yep, as I have the great privilege of supervising the boys' work crew. Today we're in the bean field."

Ty was glad it was Jeremiah who worked with the boys. He liked him. "Why don't you use machines in the fields? It would be lots faster and lots easier."

Jeremiah smiled. "You mean, why don't *we* use machines? You're one of us now, Tobias."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot. So why don't *we*?"

“That would take about three hours to answer, and we’re due among the beans. Back here, jeans and sneakers, five minutes!”

Ty went into the room that was to be his home for as long as his mother chose to remain a True Servant of the Kingdom. It wasn’t much—bare wood floors, cots and footlockers, windows with pull-down shades but no curtains, white walls. Just like the army barracks he’d seen in movies. *Not much privacy*, he thought. Then he laughed. *No privacy at all*. And precious little storage space. Good thing he didn’t own much. The footlocker was plenty big enough for his clothes and his books and his backpack. When you lived like the Raineys, mother and son, you didn’t accumulate a lot of junk.

He slipped out of the white trousers and hung them on a hook next to his extra shirt. Then he pulled on his faded jeans, jammed his bare feet into his sneakers, and went back outside. The sky was still cloudless, the sun was still warm, and birds were singing in the gigantic oak tree that stood between the boys’ building and the girls’. *A good day to begin a new life*, Ty thought.

## Chapter

# 2

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Ty had been surprised to see towheaded Noah in the bean field, his tiny hands around the handle of a half-size hoe, chopping away at the hard ground between rows. Noah, who was five, had moved from his parents' room to the boys' quarters only three days before. *Surely hoeing's too hard for him*, Ty thought. Weeding vegetables would be okay for such a little kid, or planting. Maybe, though, it was just a way to help him feel at home among the other boys, getting him out with them like this, right away, doing what the rest of them were doing. He looked cute, working away like that, a fierce concentration on his face. He seemed to be a miniature version of Jeremiah, who was working next to him, keeping an eye on him, stopping him if his little hoe came too close to the beans.

It had been a while since Ty had done this kind of work himself, and he wished he had a pair of gloves. It felt as if he were getting blisters. The handle of the hoe he worked with was smooth, worn by lots of hands. But nothing could prevent blisters except gloves. His dish-doing companion Ezekiel, working in the next row, didn't seem to notice. He was probably used to it, probably had calluses.

Ty scraped up a couple of young weeds, then brought the hoe down hard enough to break up the ground where they'd been. Then he stood straight and looked around, shading his eyes. This field seemed to stretch on forever. It looked as if all the boys were out here, lifting their hoes and bringing them down in a ragged sort of rhythm. Noah was the youngest, but there were others nearly as small. A couple of six- or seven-year-olds, a whole batch that looked around nine or ten. Ty couldn't be sure of ages. That was easy in school, where you just had to know what grade a kid was in to know how old he was. But right now the Kingdom's school was out for the spring "busy time." So there was only size to go on, and that didn't always tell you much. Caleb, for instance. Ty knew for sure that Caleb was twelve because Ezekiel had told him about all the older boys. But he'd have put the short, skinny, fragile-looking boy with the ten-year-olds if he hadn't known better. Ty watched Caleb for a moment. He was humming under his breath, moving as gracefully as if he were dancing with his hoe instead of working with it. What a difference from the way Ezekiel, large, blond, with shoulders like a linebacker, moved, his hoe coming down in strong, jerky movements. Or the way dark-eyed Gideon, at fifteen the oldest of the child-servants, attacked the weeds as if they were enemy soldiers and his hoe a bayonet. *Take that and that and that!*

Ty scraped loose a few more weeds. Everywhere else he'd lived, when kids had been put to work like this, they'd talked as they worked, stopped a lot, joked, giggled, sometimes got into arguments and had to be separated. The Kingdom was different. Except for Caleb's quiet humming, the only sounds were the sounds of the hoes hitting the ground and an occasional grunt of effort as somebody broke up a particularly hard bit of ground. *It's like an ant colony, he thought, or a beehive. Boring!*

Actually, growing up in the Kingdom probably was a little like being a bee. The kids under five who lived with their parents and were watched in a kind of daycare center in the farmhouse were like eggs. Kids from five to twelve were larvae. From twelve to sixteen they were—what was the word?—pupae. Then came Pledging, which was like coming out of a cocoon and turning into a full adult. Except that here, from five on, everybody had to be a worker. Also, from what he could tell, getting to be an adult didn't bring anything as neat as wings, the big payoff for bees. Here the only payoff seemed to be a little more freedom. Adults still had to work. Crews of men were working in other fields today, or mending fences, or making furniture in the woodworking shed both for the Kingdom and to sell outside. The women, too, worked daily in crews, weaving or making clothes, cooking, cleaning, gardening, or doing laundry. But like bees, Kingdom adults were all supposed to be pretty much alike. *Boring, boring, boring!*

Ty pictured all the True Servants in yellow-and-black-striped overalls—furry ones—then gave them wings. He grinned. He saw Jeremiah as a big bearded, ponytailed bee, walking around on a huge flower, stuffing pollen into saddlebags strapped to his legs. Ty chuckled and hacked at another weed. Of course, beehives had queens, and all the workers were female, so the image didn't really work. And anyway, Brother Daniel was a Bear, not a bee. Bears liked honey, though. Into his mind came the image of Brother Daniel, like Pooh Bear, holding tightly to the string of a balloon and floating toward a beehive, intent on a honey raid. He laughed out loud.

“Tobias.”

Ty scraped a clump of weeds.

“Tobias!”

He chopped a clod of dirt in half.

“Tobias, what’s so funny?”

Ty looked up and met Ezekiel’s eyes looking down on him. “Oh,” he said, “I’m sorry. I forgot I’m supposed to be Tobias. I’d rather you call me Ty. That’s my real name.”

Ezekiel glanced toward where Jeremiah was working. “No, it isn’t,” he hissed. “You were renamed this morning.”

“Sure, but I mean for real. Brother Daniel can call me Tobias or anything he wants. But Tie-Dye’s my legal name. It’s on my birth certificate.”

Ezekiel shook his head and shifted his hoe from one large hand to the other. “That doesn’t matter here. Here you’re Tobias, and you’d better get used to it quick.”

Ty leaned on his hoe. “Why?”

“Because Tie-Dye is a devil name.”

“Oh, come on. You don’t really believe that?”

Ezekiel began hoeing energetically. “Not so loud! Of course I believe it. That other name is of the devil, just like everything else Out There.”

“The devil didn’t give it to me. My father did.”

“Your father was of the devil, too.”

Ty grinned. “My mother would agree with that. He went off and left her when I was just a baby.” Jordana never talked about his father, said she wanted to forget him. That was okay with him, since he’d never met the man. Now if somebody said that Polaris was of the devil, that’d be different. “What was your devil name?”

“Not so loud, I said. He’ll hear you.”

“Jeremiah? What’s the matter with that? I’ll bet he doesn’t believe in devil names. Anyway, what *was* yours?”

“Keep working,” Caleb whispered from the row on Ty’s other side. He’d stopped humming but kept up the graceful, rhythmic movement of his hoe. “He didn’t have a devil name. He’s one of the Chosen.”

“Chosen?”

“If you don’t keep working, you’ll get us all in trouble. Yahweh’s Chosen. They’re the kids who were born here.”

Ty smacked his hoe against the ground and winced at the impact. Easy for them to tell him to keep working. They were used to this. “Are you one, too?” he asked the thin boy, who was contriving to stay next to him, hoeing one area over and over. Ezekiel had moved a few steps ahead of them both.

“No. My parents brought us here when I was eight and my sister was four.”

“I didn’t know you had a sister here. Why didn’t you tell me that, Ezekiel?” Ty called.

“Shh! I didn’t tell you about the girls.”

“Right, and I meant to talk to you about that.”

“If you keep stopping, you’re going to get us all extra time,” Ezekiel said.

“Extra time?”

“Yes.” Caleb brought his hoe down harder than usual. “We’ll lose half our lunchtime.”

“Okay, okay. So what was *your* devil name?”

Caleb glanced toward Jeremiah before answering, and when he did, his voice was so low, Ty had to strain to hear.

“Craig. But don’t call me that—ever. I’m not even supposed to remember it.”

“And don’t call yourself Ty either. If you don’t forget your devil name, it means you stand with the devil against Yahweh,” Ezekiel said. “And if Brother Daniel thinks that, you’re going to be sorry.” He stopped hoeing for a moment while Caleb and Ty caught up with him. “You’re new here, but you’ll learn. It’s a lot easier to listen to us than to find out for yourself,” he added and went back to work.

“A lot easier,” Caleb muttered.

Ty shrugged. He could learn to answer to Tobias, but that didn’t mean he’d quit being Ty. A legal name was a legal name. It was just about the only permanent possession he had. Besides, he had no intention of being here long enough to get used to another name. Meantime, these kids were too darned *serious*. He was definitely going to have to do something about that. What good was life if you couldn’t have a little fun?

He wished Jeremiah would call a halt for lunch. His hands hurt, his back hurt, his shoulders hurt, and he was starving. He and Jordana had not been allowed to eat breakfast before the Renaming—something about purifying their bodies by fasting. It was long past time to break this fast! Lunch, he knew, would be terrific. The main good thing about this place, he’d learned in their two weeks here, was the food. After all the junk they’d had while they lived at that motel, the Kingdom’s home-cooked, mostly homegrown food was pure heaven, even if they did eat rabbit. Not only was it good, but there was lots of it.

As if in answer to his thoughts, Jeremiah straightened up and clapped his hands. “Lunch,” he called. “Half an hour.”



Gratefully Ty dropped his hoe and looked at his hands. He'd raised blisters all right. Three of them. Maybe after lunch they'd do something different. Surely they wouldn't be expected to hoe beans all day, even if this was the spring busy time.

At the edge of the field, Jeremiah opened a large wicker hamper, and the boys gathered around him, the youngest in front. Gideon and his sidekick and shadow, Reuben, were standing at the back. Ezekiel stood nearby, towering over both of the others but keeping his distance. With them and not with them, Ty joined them. "Ham and cheese," he said. "That's what I'd like. On rye. With brown mustard."

Reuben gaped at him, showing crooked, nearly overlapping teeth. "Are you crazy? Ham?"

"Let him alone," Ezekiel said mildly. "He's new."

"Yeah, but ham?"

"Now what's wrong?" Ty asked.

"We don't eat ham," Ezekiel explained. "Or pork or bacon—Brother Daniel says pigs are unclean."

Ty laughed. "Unclean?" He thought about the chicken coops at the Home Place—the awful smell. "Nothing's dirtier than chickens, and you eat them. And what about cows?"

"Shut up," Gideon said, taking a step toward Ty, his thick, compact body tensed above short, slightly bowed legs, his fists clenched. "Don't you mock Brother Daniel." Ezekiel put a hand on Ty's shoulder and moved him a step away.

Ty shrugged the hand off. "Can't take a joke, huh?"

"Tobias," Jeremiah said from the front of the group, "hush. If you can put your teeth together for about three minutes, we'll pray so I can pass out the food."

“Sure thing.” Ty turned away from Gideon, clenched his teeth, and smiled broadly at Jeremiah. He definitely wanted the food.

“Yea, verily.” Jeremiah knelt in the dirt, and the boys followed suit. Ty sighed and did the same, his sore muscles protesting. He bowed his head and closed his eyes. “Yahweh, hear us,” Jeremiah said. “We thank you for our food and for the right to work for that food, to serve in your Kingdom for your greater glory. We thank you for bringing Tobias to join your soldiers against the devil. We hope you’ll see fit to get him in shape quickly so he can work without stopping so often or talking so much.”

Ty looked up. Jeremiah was looking at him. He winked and went on. “We thank you for your servant on earth Brother Daniel, who rules your Kingdom for the good, through whose leadership we come together to live in righteousness and to defy Satan. Thank you, Yahweh.”

“Thank you, Yahweh,” the boys repeated. Ezekiel elbowed Ty.

“Thank you, Yahweh,” Ty said.

Paper packets were passed out, and Ty reached for his eagerly. When he unwrapped it, he laughed. *Joke, right? One of those “let’s get the new kid” jokes?* But nobody, not even Gideon, was watching him to get his reaction. They had unwrapped their own packets and were sitting on the ground, eating. Bread. Two thick slices of plain bread. He shook the paper, but there was nothing else. *No ham, okay, he thought. Orthodox Jews don’t eat pork either. But how about cheese? Nothing unclean about cheese! Or peanut butter.*

He got up and went around the others to stand next to Jeremiah. “Excuse me.”

“Yes, Tobias? A problem?” Ty noticed that Jeremiah didn’t have plain bread. He was biting into something that looked like a definite sandwich. Meat of some kind. *Cheese, too*, he thought. And there was another just like it lying next to him on its wrapper. “There’s been a mistake, I think. Somebody forgot the filling.”

Jeremiah frowned. “Filling? For what?”

“My sandwich. I just got plain bread.”

Jeremiah shook his head. “You’re a child-servant, Tobias.”

“I know that. But somebody still forgot the filling....”

“Child-servants have bread at the midday meal,” Jeremiah said. “And fruit. I haven’t passed the fruit out yet.”

“But—”

Jeremiah, his partly eaten sandwich in one hand, picked up the other one and stood up. “Let’s take a little walk, Tobias.” He led Ty down the fence line until they were far enough from the others not to be overheard. He stopped and glanced back over his shoulder. Then he held out his extra sandwich. “I’ll trade with you today because you’re not used to our ways yet. But only today.” He took Ty’s bread. “Look at it this way: this is good, homemade, whole-grain bread. There’s probably more nutrition in two slices of this than in a Big Mac, and half the kids in America think a Big Mac’s a great lunch. You’ll get so you like it, believe me.”

“How come you get a regular sandwich?”

“Ah, Tobias, look at me. I’m a True Servant.” He made a muscle. “See? Big, strong, Fourth-Level True Servant. Now eat that quickly, and don’t advertise it. You don’t want me to be accused of favoritism, do you? One of the

girls will be here any minute with the milk.” He turned and went back to his place, and Ty stayed where he was. It didn’t seem fair, somehow, that the others were eating just bread. On the other hand, it wouldn’t do them any good if he refused Jeremiah’s generosity. And anyway, it was just today. Tomorrow he’d be just like everybody else. He finished the sandwich quickly, then went back and sat down with the others. During free time later he’d find Jordana. He couldn’t believe that he was going to have nothing but fruit and bread to eat for lunch for however long they stayed here. If that’s the way things were, a week would be too long.

Nobody else was complaining. They’d eaten the bread as if it were the most terrific lunch in the world. A pigtailed girl of about eight arrived with a milk jug that was nearly as big as she was, and as Jeremiah poured milk into cups he took out of the hamper, the boys lined up to get theirs. Ty, behind Ezekiel, took his cup and raised it to his lips. He nearly spit out his first sip. Goat’s milk. Awful stuff. A few people at the Home Place had drunk goat’s milk, but never Ty. He hated it. So did Polaris. He used to say if God had meant people to drink goat’s milk, he wouldn’t have given them Elsie Borden. *Quit remembering*, he told himself. He held his breath and gulped down the contents of the cup.

The fruit was handed out next: apples that had been kept in a refrigerator since fall. They were soft inside but not too bad. Jeremiah collected the cups, put them back into the hamper, and sent the little girl off carrying that and the now-empty milk jug. Visions of pizza and Cokes and Big Macs played behind Ty’s eyes. And he didn’t even like any of that stuff.

“Fifteen minutes left. Who’s up for a game of Satan’s Tail?” Jeremiah said.

Just about everybody. Satan's Tail was obviously popular. There was no time wasted choosing captains. Jeremiah merely pointed to Gideon and Reuben. Big as he was, Ezekiel had to be an asset on a team, and Gideon picked him first. Amos, a fairly good-size kid, probably fourteen, went to Reuben. Ezekiel asked Gideon to pick Ty next. He scowled but complied. They went on, then, pretty much in order of size and age, except for Caleb. He was chosen last, even after little Noah. But Caleb didn't seem to mind. In fact, he groaned when Reuben finally had to pick him because there was nobody left. He seemed to be the only one who didn't want to play.

Satan's Tail turned out to be something like capture the flag. Each team had one end of the field as its home territory. One team was called Yahweh's; the other, Satan's. When Jeremiah announced that Reuben's team was Satan's, everybody on the team groaned, but nobody argued. Two big stones were put at opposite ends of the field. The one at Yahweh's end was called Daniel's Book, Ezekiel explained, and the one at the other end was called Satan's Tail. The idea was for Satan's forces to get Daniel's Book and carry it to their end of the field. Yahweh's team was supposed to get Satan's Tail. Once they had it, all they had to do was throw it over the nearest fence. The first team to accomplish its task would win. It didn't seem fair to Ty, but since he was on Yahweh's team, he didn't argue. If you got tagged by a member of the opposite team, you were out. The main rule seemed to be to avoid trampling the beans.

"Okay, boys," Jeremiah said. "Play your strategies, and remember, no rough stuff. Tag only!"

They went to their own ends of the field. The others had obviously played the game a lot and knew exactly what they wanted to do. Gideon and Ezekiel, the biggest and strongest, would get Satan's Tail. The littlest kids were to stand guard

by Daniel's Book, and everybody in between was supposed to go after Satan's team members to get them tagged and out. Ty was told to do whatever he thought would best serve the team. He decided to run interference for Gideon and Ezekiel.

Jeremiah whistled, and the game began. It was immediately clear that Satan's team had anticipated their plan. Reuben and Amos, instead of going after Daniel's Book, came straight down the field toward Gideon and Ezekiel, so Ty headed for them. He tagged Amos out, but Reuben swerved away. For a few minutes it was like a huge game of tag, with both teams intent on getting as many of their opponents out as possible. Sometimes it was hard to tell who had tagged whom, and Jeremiah had to act as referee. Usually it turned out to be Satan's people who were out.

Nobody even tried to get Daniel's Book. The kids who were supposed to guard it soon left it and joined the others. Two boys went after Caleb and tackled him. He went down heavily and stayed where he was. Ty saw him fall and stopped, waiting for Jeremiah to call a halt and go see if Caleb was hurt, but nothing happened. Jeremiah appeared not to notice. Or if he noticed, he looked away. Ty didn't have time to worry about Caleb. Reuben had tagged Gideon out and was going after Ezekiel, who had hefted Satan's Tail off the ground and was struggling toward the fence with it. The members of Yahweh's team who had been tagged out set up a cheer, and Ty jumped across a bean row to try to catch Reuben. But he was still too far away. Reuben was gaining on Ezekiel.

"Look out behind you, Zeke!" Ty yelled, his voice cutting through the general uproar.

There was a sudden silence. Everybody, including Reuben and Ezekiel, stopped and turned toward Ty. On

their faces were looks of disbelief. And something else—fear? Ezekiel dropped Satan’s Tail. *Now what?* Ty looked at them. What was wrong?

“Tobias!” Jeremiah was striding toward him, stepping over the rows of beans.

“What? What’d I do?”

“All right, the rest of you, game’s over. It wasn’t your fault. No penalties, no extra time. Go on back to work.”

Ty watched the others scurry back to where they had left their hoes. What had happened?

Jeremiah stood in front of him now and put his hands on Ty’s shoulders, gripping hard enough to hurt. Jeremiah looked like a different person—no laughter in his eyes, no friendly conspiracy. “His name is Ezekiel,” Jeremiah said. “You are never, under any circumstances, to call anyone by anything other than his full name. Do you understand?”

“I—I guess so,” Ty stammered. “But I only—I mean, I don’t see what—”

“Nicknames are devil names—unlawful in the Kingdom,” Jeremiah said. The penalty for using a devil name is a fast day.”

“A fast day?”

“No breakfast, no lunch, no dinner.”

“Just for a nickname?”

Jeremiah’s grip tightened, and Ty winced. “That’s a minor penalty. Now listen to me, Tobias, and listen carefully. You’d better take the laws here very seriously. Anything else is stupid, and you are not a stupid kid.” Jeremiah glanced over the field. The other boys were hoeing industriously, carefully ignoring the two of them. His eyes, flat and hard,

softened slightly as he looked back at Ty. “I’m going to let you off this time. But that’s the last thing I can do for you. Make that kind of mistake in front of somebody else, like Abner, and it would be very different. There are two ways to get along here. One is to obey every law there is. The other is to be sure you are never, never caught. I suggest that the first is easier.” He relaxed his grip, then smiled a tight imitation of the smile Ty had come to expect from him. “When you learn how to get along here, life in the Kingdom’s just fine. Like I said, you’re not a stupid kid. Learn fast.” He ruffled Ty’s hair with a heavy hand. “Okay?”

“Okay.”

Ty went back to pick up his hoe, still feeling Jeremiah’s fingers on his sore shoulders. It was still a warm, clear, sunny day in May. And his mother was still better off here than she’d been for a long time. But this new life was not going to be quite what he’d thought. Finding the good things about it wasn’t going to be so easy. *A challenge, that’s what this is*, he thought. *A definite challenge.*