

Derek Christian, Antichrist

A Collection of Short Stories
by
Robert R. Railey

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Derek Christian, Antichrist?

Prologue

"At the time of the end"

In one instant, the sky will open up to reveal multiple shafts of fire and terrifying bolts of lightning which will emanate downward from the heavens. And from that time on, the average person will know that the time of the ancient Biblical Prophecy of Armageddon is upon us; and we will also know that the Earth will be consumed by fire."

But before the nations of Gog and Magog can be destroyed in the apocalyptic battle, and also well before Satan and the False Prophet can be thrown in a 'bottomless pit" for a thousand years, the people on Earth must first endure the second half of "The Tribulation."

It's been written that the first half of the seven years of "The Tribulation" will afford the people on Earth a full three and one half years of unprecedented peace and prosperity. We have also been told that during the second half of The Tribulations we will see war and pestilence not seen since the Biblical days.

Nowadays, the nagging question on many people's minds is just exactly how the true believers will be able to spot the Antichrist. Regrettably, this may not be an easy task for us to achieve; and that's simply because it's very doubtful that the Antichrist will show up sporting horns that protrude from his head; nor, will he most likely be dragging around a long tail. It's been said, however, that we'll know him by his deeds.

Though in recent times, more than a few people around the world have come to believe that the previously unknown

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preacher from the Western Kentucky area who'd just recently been recognized as being the absolute ruler of the televangelists might just be the Antichrist.

Chapter One

Within a few short years following the last battle of the American Revolution the wilderness tract of land known as Kentucky would officially become the fifteenth state of the newly formed United States of America; and since Kentucky lay directly to the west of Virginia some of the men who'd fought in America's War of Independence were given sizable land grants in the new state in lieu of payments for fighting on the line.

But then during those early pioneer days, there were very few courts of law to be found anywhere in the state of Kentucky; and the U. S. Military posts were even more scarce which left the early settlers of the region no choice then but to resort to the only type of law that was readily available to them; and which then meant that frontier justice would have to prevail.

So for that reason, it was not unusual for the different groups of vigilantes to have to expel the violent and the antisocial individuals from their frontier communities; and on certain other occasions it even became necessary for them to hang somebody.

Consequently, myriads of myths and legends have greatly abounded concerning the early frontier days in Kentucky. And in a film from yesteryear, which was titled, "How the west was won," there was one particular scene filmed in the Western Kentucky area that quite accurately depicted a notorious family of river pirates that made its living by robbing and killing the unassuming and trusting boaters who were traversing the Ohio River. Thus after having practiced their murderous ways of luring the people into there lair, the killers would then dump

their victim's bodies down in a deep hole in the floor of a cave which was located in the side of the riverbank.

That same part of Western Kentucky was also home to the infamous Harp brothers and their brother in-law, who just happened to be the duly elected Sheriff of the district, but who was also the leader of a real life gang of murdering thieves that robbed and killed the people living in the Western Kentucky communities; until, that is, when the vigilantes and the local militia made the fateful decision to put a stop to it.

And as it has been previously noted in some of the published accounts of the aforementioned incident, the militiamen proceeded to shoot and kill the renegade Sheriff as he sat comfortably in a chair in the gang's ferry office on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River. Then shortly thereafter, the vigilantes captured one of the Harp brothers at a nearby crossroads where they proceeded to place his severed head in a fork of a tree which was forevermore known as "Harp's Head." It's long been said that the militiamen left the man's head in the tree to serve as a warning to the people in the area to show just exactly what would happen if they ever decided to embark upon a life of crime.

Then following that rather impromptu execution of one of the Harp brothers, a few of the militia members trailed the other Harp brother all of the way down the Natchez Trace to the city of New Orleans, Louisiana where they just happened to find him enjoying himself in a brothel. And after first dragging the man to the outside, the militiamen proceeded to execute him right there on the sidewalk.

Chapter Two

Modern-day Kentucky

With three years of military service in the U. S. Air Force behind him, and also with twenty-five thousand dollars of

questionably procured money in his pocket, you would think that a person's first thoughts would be of home; and yet, Derek Christian wasn't so sure about that.

His home was in Western Kentucky, that is, if he ever decided to return; but what was waiting for him there? What with the ever-increasing number of high sulfur coalmines being shut down every year, and then too, there was the mean spirited woman who was under the impression that they were betrothed to be married, Derek wasn't any too thrilled with the idea of going back home; but he probably would.

His wife to be was a fairly new transplant to that particular part of Western Kentucky. Her name was Barbara Holton of the Holton Clan from the Pattyville, Kentucky district. In Derek's opinion she was without a doubt the sexiest and the most sensual woman he'd ever met. But marrying into the Holton clan would necessarily cause Derek to undertake some very deep considerations; for the rumors abounded that if a person were to ever betray a member of the Holton clan in any way, then they would just as likely take you down to the river and (drowned-ye). They were a rowdy bunch, alright, and they were most generally inclined to settle their arguments with knives and guns.

According to the local legend, the Holton clan had migrated to Derek's part of Western Kentucky after a group of vigilantes had driven them out of the Pattyville district following a fiasco which had occurred at a funeral home. For years, the Holtons had had a longstanding feud with another clan from the Pattyville area; and the melee' which had ensued inside a funeral home had purportedly come about after the elder Holton had deliberately urinated on the body of a dead man while he was lying in a casket. Then once the fight had begun in earnest, the patriarch of Holton family had proceeded to cut off one of the dead man's brother's ear.

Although later on that same day, Uncle Clinton Holton would become another casualty of the feud when he became involved in a barroom brawl with a member of the enemy clan

and wound up getting shot in the stomach; amazingly, though, Uncle Clinton somehow survived that particular ordeal.

Eventually, though, both sides began to tire of the constant fighting and the leaders of the clans agreed upon a tentative, if somewhat fragile truce. But when the feud broke out anew, all of the other families in the area that weren't personally involved in the mayhem formed a vigilante posse that immediately banned the entire Holton clan from the Pattyville area upon pain of death should the warning not be heeded.

Babs Holton, as Barbara preferred to be called, was a dark-haired beauty of about five feet and four inches of height; but when those black eyes of hers were on fire, she gave the impression of being seven feet tall and bullet proof.

According to their family's history, before migrating to Western Kentucky the Holtons were some of the first settlers to pioneer and then homestead the mountainous regions of Tennessee; and during those early days, the legend states further that a few of the Holton men had married into a Native American family which might have given Babs her coal black hair and high cheekbones; plus the inability for her to be able to successfully drink any alcoholic beverages at all.

At times, Babs could be as sweet and gentle as a newborn lamb, but then on other occasions she could be just as volatile as her four brothers, who without a doubt, were some of the meanest fighters who'd ever come out of the mountains.

So as a result, Derek had made it a steadfast point to never drink any alcoholic beverages with the Holton clan. On the other hand, his decision not to socialize with the Holtons was brought on by the fact that not only was the Holton clan a too violent of a group to drink with, but he also thought that the drinking of liquor was a foolish waste of good money. In reality, though, that particular line of thinking had more to do with what Derek was really all about; and that was his desire to become extremely wealthy.

Chapter Three

The Christian family had migrated to Western Kentucky in order to help lay some of the first railroad tracks ever constructed in that area. Ultimately, though, they fell in love with the beautiful and fertile land of Western Kentucky which included the gently rolling hills and lush meadows which surround the community of Clay, Kentucky, which in their opinion, was one of the most beautiful parts of the whole of Webster County.

Then once settled in, the Christian family decided to homestead a tract of bottomland in the Tradewater River region; and subsequently, they've been living in that particular district ever since. Then again, who wouldn't love the beautifully wooded hills which at times will block the mist covered meadows until the late morning sun creeps up high enough to cause the fields to come alive with the bright vistas of Kentucky Bluegrass and the flowering goldenrod plants which just happen to be the state flower.

And even though more than a few of the Christian family men were still employed by the same railroad company that their ancestors had worked for back in their home state of West Virginia, some of the members of the Christian family had opted to work in the coalmines of Western Kentucky. Then too, quite a few of their clan had answered the call to serve their Lord by becoming Baptist Ministers.

Yet when it came to physical labor, Derek Christian didn't particularly care for any of the types of the work that many of his family members favored; instead, he planned on searching for a vocation that would allow him to amass a small fortune, while at the same time doing as little work as humanely possible. Derek also felt that he was extremely fortunate to have an overabundance of a certain type of acid in his body, which he believed, would not only cause him to suffer severe muscle cramps while performing manual labor, but it also caused his jewelry, and even those small metal screws in his reading glasses to turn green. Also oddly enough, one of the very worst effects of his strange ailment was that his condition would not allow

him to remain out of doors for any extended amount of time because of an overabundance of a particular chemical in his body which seemed to attract mosquitoes and chiggers.

Indeed, there were times when Derek felt that he was blessed to have such a fortunate and God given excuse that would allow him to forgo any type of physical labor without receiving a lot of criticism from his family and neighbors. Derek had also excused himself from ever working in the coalmines, when after on three separate occasions, the roofs of the mines had caved in on both his father and his grandfather.

Chapter Four

A distant cousin of Derek's, who just happened to be one of his childhood heroes, was a very interesting character to say the least. For at one time in the past Harold Hanson had been one of the biggest bootleggers and whiskey runners in the entire Western Kentucky area. Though after he'd decided to go straight, he eventually ended up owning a great number of successful businesses and productive farms in the Western Kentucky area.

One of Harold's claims to fame was that he'd been wounded several times by members of the notorious Shelton gang which included Blackie Harris, who was another infamous bootlegging gangster member of the brethren. At that particular time, the Shelton gang operated primarily out of Southern Illinois; but its tentacles reached deeply into the neighboring states which included Kentucky and Indiana. Supposedly, it was one of Harold's old lieutenants from the illegal whisky business who'd shown Derek a few of the sites along a Southern Illinois highway where some of the casualties of the whiskey wars had allegedly been buried.

Generally speaking, Derek suspected that the majority of Harold's war stories were mostly true; and especially since Derek just happened to personally know one of families which had lost

five of their sons in the whiskey wars. Then again, it wasn't only the bootlegging business which had caused the people living in the Western Kentucky area a great deal of trouble; for two of Derek's own family members had been killed in the coalmine strikes which had taken place during the early parts of the twentieth century.

In one particular confrontation, the owners of a local coalmine had allegedly hired a trainload of strikebreakers from the city of Chicago, Illinois in order to try prevent the coalminers from Western Kentucky from joining the United Mineworker's Union. And in the gun battle which followed, one of Derek's distant cousins was killed by one of the strikebreakers; while at the same time another of his cousins had died at the hands of a local deputy sheriff.

To Derek, it seemed as if violence had always plagued this particular part of the country; and even his hometown of Clay, Kentucky had seen its own share of mayhem. For when Derek was but a child he just happened to be downtown Clay one day when an armed and dangerous man had blatantly refused to surrender his weapon to the town Marshal who then had no other recourse but to employ deadly force. Then later on, the local courts would declare that the marshal had simply been upholding the law; and therefore, the shooting was a case of justifiable homicide.

Nonetheless, a similar fate might have befallen Derek's three hundred and thirty pound uncle Vernis Curry Paulson, who after first imbibing an enormous quantity of moonshine liquor, had shown up in downtown Clay on Election Day with a large hog leg pistol strapped to his waist. Although luckily for uncle Vernis, the same Town Marshall who'd just previously shot and killed a man in downtown Clay was able to disarm the drunken uncle Vernis who was then allowed to sleep it off in the local jail.

Chapter Five

"Booster," as Derek Christian was affectionately known to his family and friends owned a lanky and rawboned six-foot four inch frame which was handsomely topped off by an unruly shock of dark brown hair that hung loosely above an affable smile. Some people remarked that he reminded them of the loveable Will Rogers of old who'd hailed from Oklahoma and was quite the celebrity back in his day. Rogers had appeared in several Hollywood films as the loveable old cowboy who could perform amazing rope tricks. Rogers primarily enjoyed being in the spotlight where he could effectively deliver his political barbs which were usually aimed at the office holding politicians.

And even though Will Rogers was a very popular and entertaining satirist and political activist back in his day, his brand of humor would not necessarily be out of style today since it would be strikingly similar to a few of the same types of stand up comics who regularly appear on television.

For the most part, though, the people who knew Booster certainly didn't believe that he was a satirist or even an activist like the Will Rogers of old: instead, they thought of him more as a pitchman for he always had something going on which he hoped would make him rich. But in order for him to fully implement his latest money making scheme, he would not only need the co-operation of his rather large and extended family, but he would also need the assistance from quite a few of the other people who lived and worked in the region.

Nevertheless, there was always something new and exciting going on when Booster was around and about: and a person could always bet that whatever was going on with Booster it would certainly be entertaining. Even so, the locals always hoped and prayed that Booster's latest venture wouldn't cost them too much money.

It wasn't so much that the people didn't trust Booster: moreover, when they first learned about one of his latest exploits, they would usually just shake their heads and smile; then again, they would also be a bit curious as to what the newest scheme was all about.

On the other hand, though, they would also have to admit that there'd been a few people around the area who'd actually made a great deal of money from Booster's varied and sundry enterprises.

Chapter Six

It's also a well-known fact that Derek Christian wasn't the only colorful character to have called Western Kentucky his home for there was another man who'd hailed from the same general area and had gone on to accomplish even greater things. When Booster's father was a child growing up in the town of Clay, there was a local businessman there by the name of Hunky Blueford who at the time had owned a tiny ice-cream shop in the downtown area that would serve you up a tremendously large scoop of ice cream on a cone for only five cents.

In time, however, Mr. Blueford would go on to own several dairy farms in the general area as well as many other related businesses, until eventually, he would amass enough money to afford him a chance to run for the U. S. Congress. Unfortunately, though, the man failed in his attempt to win a seat in the U. S. Congress. However, the man's financial successes had definitely made an incalculable impression on young Derek Christian for it'd shown him just exactly what money can buy.

But then after having spent some quality time with his family and his fiancé, Babs Holton, Booster decided to look up an old childhood friend of his. Whenever Booster thought about his early childhood days it would invariably include the memory of the day that he and his friend Tug Whitledge had shown up in downtown Clay with blood streaming from their faces and arms where they were forced to confess to the town Marshall that not only had they'd been caught stealing watermelons from Mr. Winstead's patch, but also that he'd peppered them with some rock salt loaded shotgun shells; and so naturally,

everybody in town had a good laugh over that particular incident.

Derek and Tug had spent many a memorable day while swimming and "hogging" for fish, turtles and the occasional copper belly water snake which, from time to time, could be found in the hollowed out spaces below the water line and beneath the roots of the large trees that lined the banks of the Tradewater River.

Hence, at that point in time, Booster's most immediate problem was how best to locate his friend Tug. Eventually, however, he was able to find him working in the fields alongside his father and his two brothers. Then after sharing a few moments of genuine emotions with one another, the two friends made plans to meet up later that evening at an eating-place in downtown Clay.

Then after finishing their evening meal, the two friends hopped into Tug's pickup truck and then headed down the old state highway number 109 towards Providence, KY where they'd planned on picking up Clifton E. Raleigh III who was the third part of the trilogy of their lifelong friendships.

Cliff was a pleasure, alright, for he was joyous, happy, and free most of the time; and that was in spite of having to live with the loss of his mother when he was a mere child. Of course it wasn't only the loss of his mother which had hampered his emotional maturity, for just shortly after Cliff's mother had passed away, his father had married a woman many years his junior; and then later on, that impromptu marriage had proved to be a big mistake when shortly thereafter the new bride began an affair with a young farmhand who worked for Cliff's father.

In time, the young wife and her lover devised what they thought was a foolproof plan whereby they could do away with the older gentleman in order to acquire his rather sizeable estate which included a large productive farm in addition to the money he'd earned in his younger years when he was a professional prizefighter.

And in addition to the property that Mr. Raleigh owned outright, he'd also invested tens of thousands of dollars in the various diamond rings that he wore on the fingers of both hands. Evidently, those outward signs of luxury and wealth had been too much for the young bride and her lover to resist.

So when the full story of that terrible event was eventually revealed, every soul in town would learn that the young bride had suggested to her elderly husband that the two of them should embark upon a lusty and sensuous twilight romp atop the highest hill on their farm; and unfortunately for the elderly man it was there that Mr. Raleigh was lured into an encounter which had almost proved to be fatal. It seems that after first disrobing while standing on the hilltop, the young bride had easily gained Mr. Raleigh's rapt attention, while at the same time, the young farmhand had crept up behind the older gentleman from where he proceeded to shove him off of the top of a high cliff to what should have been his death.

Then immediately following the hilltop assault, and being that the young couple honestly believed that the older man was indeed dead, the two lovebirds hurriedly returned to the farm where they took their time in cleaning out the entire household of everything that was of any value. During the following day, however, the situation had changed drastically when the young wife received word from their bank that the joint bank accounts that she'd shared with her husband had been closed.

It seems as if Clifton Raleigh II had somehow managed to drag his beaten and bloodied body all of the way into the town of Morganfield, KY where a shop owner had observed him buying firearms which he said he direly needed in order to exact the revenge that he felt he had coming to him because of the terrible wrong which had just been done to him. Then fortunately for the young Mrs. Raleigh, someone from town was sent out to the Raleigh farm to tell the young couple that they'd better clear out of the area before the older man returned home.

So by the time that the elderly Mr. Raleigh was able to return to his home, the two would-be murdering thieves had absconded with all of the personal property that they could possibly load onto their two pickup trucks. Meanwhile, some of the townspeople of Morganfield, Kentucky reported that they'd heard that the two lovebirds were headed for California. So by practicing a lot of patience and tolerance, the young Clifton Raleigh III had somehow managed to rise above the turmoil and trauma that he'd been faced with throughout much of his life. More importantly, though, Clifton, had developed into what most people considered to be a normal and responsible young man.

Chapter Seven

As most of the people in the area were inclined to say, Booster Christian was a dreamer of elaborate designs: and as such, his number one dream was that he would someday be able to sell a one-dollar Hula-Hoop to every single person in China for a princely sum of five dollars apiece; and with well over a billion Chinese on the planet, it would seem as if a scheme of that magnitude would surely return a rather healthy profit.

Yet no one could say that Booster had not been successful in several of his previous ventures: for at various times he was heavily invested in the pyramid types of businesses which had included the original phone cards, and then later on he'd become part of the herbal revolution. And during the three years in which he'd served in the military, he was able to continue on with many of his business interests back home in Kentucky. For example, he'd been able to add several hundreds of new clients to his various pyramid businesses because of the thousands of U. S. servicemen and women he'd come into contact with while serving in the U. S. Air Force.

Still, there was a well hidden side of Booster's personality and character that he didn't necessarily want people to know

about: and that very simply was the fact that he always kept an unknown plan of attack and agenda under his hat until such time that he was fully ready to spring it upon the unassuming public.

And since satellites had begun to circle the globe, he knew that a person needed only to own a computer, and then to also subscribe to an internet service provider in order to send electronic e-mails to any of his thousands of business associates which were scattered throughout the world; so naturally, Booster's various Pyramid schemes had expanded exponentially. Then again, that was mainly due to the thanks of the hundreds of new pyramid members which he'd brought on board while serving those three years in the U. S. military.

Back in the latter part of the twentieth century, Booster was one of the first people in the Western Kentucky area to become a distributor for the very popular pre-paid phone cards; and within a short period of time, the selling of those phone cards would end up being a most lucrative business for him. For when the phone cards first appeared on the market they'd created a land rush type of commerce. Those cards were especially coveted by the people who didn't have access to long distance calling. Eventually, though, the cards would end up being sold out of practically every convenience store in the country.

Nevertheless, it'd been a tremendous learning experience for a young businessman such as Booster: so from then on, he would learn that in order for a person to become successful in any of the pyramid types of schemes, an individual needed only to bring together a group of people who were interested in making some fast money. Derek also discovered that the only way for the original distributors in any pyramid plan to make any real money would be for them to continue to bring new people on board. This then would ensure that those who were climbing to the top of the distributors list would benefit financially from the newest members of the scheme who were still on the bottom of the ever expanding list.

Then once the phone card game was finally over and done with, the next pyramid type of program that Booster became involved in was put together by a group of attorneys, who theoretically, would accept an inexpensive prepaid fee if any of the paid-up members of the plan were to ever find themselves in need of some good, professional legal advice. In a way, this program was very similar to the prepaid phone card plan to the extent that the main purpose of the plan was to continually bring new people on board who wished to become distributors.

It seemed as if Booster had always been involved in one scheme or another; and at one time in the past he was member of a pyramid plan that distributed various health food supplements such as herbs, vitamins, diet pills and natural health products. Of course it must be said that the main objective for anyone involved in those types of pyramid schemes is that it's not necessary for a member to personally sell the products, although they may do so if they wish, but the main goal is for the original members of the plan to continually bring new distributors into the fold; for when all the smoke clears, that's how they make their big money. It's really quite simple; a distributor is paid a commission for every new person he or she brings on board.

So as a rule, the only people who ever make any real money in a pyramid scheme are the ones at the top of the distributor list; and from then on, the newest members of the scheme will simply help to enrich the pocketbooks of the people who were already at the top of the list.

Chapter Eight

Since Booster knew practically every single farmer in the area by his first name, it seemed only logical to him that he should devise a plan that would help them make some extra money; of course it goes without saying that the plan would also have to help him out financially. So after much due consideration, Booster was ready to launch a new business venture that would give the farmers a way in which to harvest a quick and easy cash crop: by the same token, the scheme would not require of them to put up a lot of front money; or at the very least, they wouldn't be required to make an enormous investment.

Then as luck would have it, the timing for Booster's newest adventure couldn't have come at a better time for it was about that same point in time when the tobacco production in the state of Kentucky had begun to sharply decline. And since most farmers could always use another cash crop to supplement their incomes which usually come from the sales of their grain crops and livestock, Booster sincerely hoped that they would be open to a brand-new moneymaking type of proposition.

So after first consulting with some fish farm owners from the deep South, Booster came up with a plan that would require of each local farmer to make an annual investment of only twelve hundred dollars in order to restock their newly acquired fish ponds. His figuring was that once the fully grown fish were sold to the distributors in the East and Midwestern parts of the country, the farmers could expect to show a profit of three thousand dollars a year; and that was after having worked on the project for a period of only eight months. Those four months off would allow for the inclement winter weather which a person could expect if you lived in the Western Kentucky area.

Derek's plan also required of the farmers to dig their own fishponds; but if there was one thing that he knew for sure

about farmers was that they certainly weren't afraid of a little hard work.

The problem was, however, Booster had no real evidence to support the facts relating to the annual dollar amount of profit that the farmers could expect to earn from the fish farms: for in all actuality he'd manufactured those numbers in order to fit them into his somewhat overblown sales presentation; but as Booster was fond of saying, "Absence of evidence is not absence of fact".

Nonetheless, the first ten farmers that Booster had approached with the fish farm plan seemed quite receptive to the idea; and as such, each of them had come up with the twelve hundred dollar deposit. Although the next man on his list of prospects was a farmer by the name of Grant Tolliver who just also happened to be a Baptist Minister. Reverend Tolliver had listened attentively and politely to Booster's sales pitch, but then when Booster asked him for the twelve hundred dollar deposit, the reverend answered him with a statement of his own.

"When pigs fly," he said, and that'd pretty well ended the conversation. "And besides," as the pastor continued, "God always has and always will provide for us."

It was also at that point in time when the reverend inquired about Booster's spiritual condition; and since the reverend was obligated to carry the Gospel to the sinners he wouldn't take no for an answer until Booster agreed to attend Reverend Tolliver's Southern Baptist Church on the following Sunday morning.

To his credit, however, Booster did indeed keep his word to the preacher: for he actually did attend the pastor's church service on the following Sunday morning; and at the end of the service, as was customary, the pastor asked everybody in the church to bow their heads and to close their eyes.

Of course the bowing of heads would just naturally be followed by a musical arrangement called the "Altar Call" which is a fairly common practice in many of the Baptist Churches. And as the more frequent visitors are aware, that particular part

of the service is an open invitation to the people who may wish to come forward so that they might receive God's forgiveness for their sins; and if they feel the need to be saved, then it also affords them the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior.

Then somewhat amazingly, it was at that very moment when a strange and wonderful feeling came over Booster; and even stranger was the fact that he couldn't seem to resist the urge to rise up and then walk towards the altar where he kneeled and began to confess his sins before God, Reverend Tolliver, and all of the rest of his friends and neighbors.

At that very moment, Booster had not only asked God to forgive him for all the mistakes that he'd made while involved in the pyramid schemes, but also for all of the wrong things that he'd done while stationed in the Philippine Islands. Eventually, though, Booster was able to rise up from his knees; and then once he'd regained his composure he pleaded openly with the preacher for permission to share his confession and testimony with the entire congregation.

Then right there in front of God and the parishioners, Booster vowed that the monies that the farmers had invested with him to furnish the seed stock on their uncompleted fish farms would be returned to them with interest. Then after the entire congregation had said amen in unison, the preacher asked Booster to please come back for both the Wednesday night prayer meeting and the following Sunday's service just so he could once again share his testimony with the congregation; for in the preacher's eyes, it was beginning to look as if God might have called Derek to serve.

Chapter Nine

Ever since they'd first migrated from West Virginia to Kentucky, religion and hard work were certainly nothing new to the Christian family; and of course Derek was well aware of the fact that he'd come from a long line of farmers, railroaders, coalminers and Baptist Ministers. So in keeping with the family's traditional few of Derek's family members had always insisted on staging their own personal Tent Revival Meetings in and around the Western Kentucky area.

And more often than not, it was Derek's mother who played the piano during those church revivals while his father did most of the singing. Though as a rule, it was his grandfather, Samuel Christian, who did most of the preaching. To a child, those summertime revivals were exciting and most pleasurable; and Derek had many a fond memory of the times when he'd sat on a front row bench beneath that huge tent while at the same time dangling his bare feet in the sawdust which had just recently been scattered upon the bare earth.

Then at the end of the revival service, the nice ladies of the area would more often than not serve the Christian family a box lunch of chicken dinners along with warm milk which had come straight from a cow; and on certain occasions the ladies might even bring along some fresh homemade pies or some apple pan dowdies.

In those days, the love of religion was definitely a passion in the Western Kentucky region: and not only was Derek expected to attend church services every Sunday morning, but he'd also been commanded to attend the Wednesday evening prayer service. So while growing up, attending church was as much a part of his normal routine as was his schooling and farm work. And even when he'd traveled along with his high school basketball team to the Kentucky State finals he was expected to attend church at least one time while there.

For Derek, his new way of living had left him feeling free and clean. And then once all of the fish farm money had been returned to the farmers, it wasn't long before some of the leaders of the area churches started asking Derek to speak at their churches. So when the Southern Baptist Conference announced that they would schedule their next annual convention in the city of Nashville, Tennessee nobody in the area was any too surprised when the local ministers nominated Derek and Reverend Tolliver to represent them at the convention. Of course only Reverend Tolliver would have the authority to be able to vote on any of the many policy changes they could expect to confront that year.

Although just as surprisingly, Reverend Tolliver was determined to try to convince the convention committee members to allow Derek to speak to the entire audience of ministers; and this was in spite of the fact that Derek had not as yet been ordained. Even so, Reverend Tolliver was convinced that Derek Christian had been called to serve the Lord.

Nonetheless, until it was actually time for the two men to head off to the convention in Nashville, Derek would continue to work on his father's farm; and naturally, he would also try to spend as much time as he could with finance' Babs and his two childhood friends, Tug and Cliff.

Chapter Ten

On the day before the Southern Baptist Convention was scheduled to begin, Derek and Reverend Tolliver loaded their luggage into one of the church's old gray vans before heading on down towards Nashville, Tennessee. Thus with Derek's brand new Sunday-go-to-meeting suit hanging in the rear of the vehicle, he related a story to Reverend Tolliver about the almost daily joke that his school chums had played on him while he was still in school. It seemed as if one of his childhood friends could almost always be counted on to ask him how long he'd been a

Christian: then of course, he would just naturally tell them that he'd always been a Christian. Now, however, it was actually true and not just because his surname was Christian.

After arriving in Nashville, the two men would then, of course, become actively involved in the day-to-day work at the conference. They would also discover that it would take a full five days of routine and sometimes quite boring discussion meetings before the Southern Baptist Conference member's committee would get around to voting on the newly recommended changes in policy. Then once back home in their respective states, the ministers would submit the recommendations to their own parishioners and church deacons who would either accept or reject the suggestions.

At the conference, the two men would discover that Saturday was always one of the most important days of the entire convention: for as a rule, that's generally the day that the guest speakers engage the audience with what the organizers hope will be their splendid oratory gifts; and so naturally, Reverend Tolliver thought it would be only fitting if Derek were allowed to stand before the convention members and deliver his well rehearsed speech on that fateful Saturday afternoon.

The placing of Derek's name on the roster along with the well-known dignitaries from around the country had not been an easy task; but then primarily because of Reverend Tolliver's lifelong association with the organization, and also quite possibly because of his persistence, the members of the board had no choice then but to relent. Nevertheless, the real shocker came later on that same day when a representative from a newly formed Christian Television Broadcasters network approached the two men and offered to buy them dinner. Then after the normal dinner conversation had subsided, the man who claimed that he presented a well-respected religious broadcasting network hinted that he might just have a very interesting offer for them to consider.

Unfortunately, though, Derek and Reverend Tolliver would have to return back home to Western Kentucky and then

wait another several more days before they would eventually receive the long-awaited phone call from the president of the Christian Television Broadcasting Corporation with whom they'd dined when they were in Nashville. And when the phone call finally came, the two men were pleasantly surprised when they received an invitation to travel to Atlanta, Georgia in order to discuss a possible contractual agreement with the president of the network.

Of course it was only natural that the two men should be excited about making the trip to Atlanta; for as Reverend Tolliver was fond of saying, they were just simply trying to do God's work. But then after arriving in Atlanta, they were immediately directed to the office of the president of the broadcasting corporation, a certain Mr. Fergus K. Denton, who produced a voluminous file, which he said, had been painstakingly compiled by a team of private investigators. The file also included some documents from various law enforcement agencies.

From then on, Mr. Denton hardly ever mentioned the investigative file again; he did, however, explain in great detail just exactly what the corporation would expect of Derek if the broadcasting company decided to prep and then train him for a life that would be spent primarily in front of their television cameras.

It soon became apparent to Derek and Reverend Tolliver that Mr. Denton was a man of very few words: for he almost immediately went straight to the point by telling them that his religious broadcasting network already had millions of daily viewers; and also that, they owned dozens of affiliate television stations spread out across the U. S. and Canada. Even so, Mr. Denton had to concede the fact that his broadcasting network might not be as well-known as the Pat Roberts or the Jerry Falwell networks. Then again, he said that he honestly believed that if they were to find the right T. V. personality then his corporation would be capable of attracting a much larger portion of the religious broadcasting television audience.

Whether such a statement was intended as flattery or not, Derek had no way of knowing. Derek was also told that since he was blessed with a photogenic countenance, and that he also owned a pleasant and resonating voice, Mr. Denton believed that those two qualities alone would help to attract new viewers: or at the very least, it would help for a while. "Of course on down the road a new T. V. personality had better have some other qualities or else he couldn't expect to last very long in a medium such as television," Denton said.

Lastly, Mr. Denton stated that his corporate people had polled the Nashville audience following Derek's thirty minute speech at the convention and they'd discovered that the majority of those interviewed said that they could feel the sincerity flowing out of Derek's soul.

Denton then said that he would be terribly disappointed if Derek didn't eventually become one of the most influential televangelist in the entire country; that is, of course, once after he'd been properly trained and refined by his corporation's promotional teams.

Even so, Derek and Reverend Tolliver were somewhat taken aback when Denton handed them a rather lengthy contract to read. And not so surprisingly, the very first paragraph in the contract said that in order for Derek to become a televangelist for Denton's Christian Broadcasting Corporation, he must first become an ordained minister. On the other hand, though, Derek was told that for the time being he needn't worry himself too much about such minor details; and especially since it'd already been arranged for him to attend some classes in theology and public speaking at a well respected Seminary located in the Midwest.

The next paragraph in the numerously paged contract was something that the men from Western Kentucky had already expected; it stated that the executives of the corporation most definitely desired that Derek should immediately get married. Mr. Denton then said that, "he already knew all about Derek's finance' Barbara Holton and her volatile family, but that

he considered the situation to be a minor problem which could be resolved by simply keeping her out of the lime light."

The wording in the contract also affirmed that Derek would immediately begin to receive a base salary from the corporation; but then after the program had been on T. V. for a while, his annual income would be commensurate with the total dollar amount of donations and membership fees that were almost surely bound to follow. Even so, both Reverend Tolliver and Mr. Denton were somewhat stunned when Derek slid the contract back across the desk while politely declining the offer.

"Before I could even think about doing God's work I would first have to feel that I am properly qualified. Likewise, I would also have to feel in my own heart that I have truly been called to serve the Lord," Derek said.

But then after carefully picking up the papers from the desk, Mr. Denton began to read aloud the last paragraph of the contract. "Derek Christian will submit a ten thousand word essay to this corporate office by no later than fourteen days from the date of this interview. In the essay, he will outline his views on religion and on the role he thinks that the church should play in the lives of all men and women."

"We too, want to be sure that you have been chosen to serve the Lord," Denton said.