

Chapter One

My Name is ...

A set of yellowed headlights from an aging pickup truck appeared in the distance.

The driver slowed, rounded the corner and approached a stately old church building in the center of town. A soft amber glow emanated from the basement windows of the sanctuary, while above it spread a canopy of velvet salted with tiny specks of light.

As the pickup entered the parking lot, a dozen leathery wings stirred. Sharp talons scraped the roof of the old building and scores of red eyes watched with evil intent at the figure exiting his truck. Unheard, a low growl percolated from the throat of the leader of a hoard of demons.

“Shall I kill him, master?” a shriveled, emaciated demon asked, his mouth dripping with froth.

The spirit of hatred, a hulking beast with horns protruding from either side of its head, glanced sideways at his underling. He had no love for the man walking across the parking lot, neither had he any love for those who served under his command. He sought power and more of it. If killing this mortal would advance his cause, then so be it, but if letting him live would do more harm to God’s kingdom, then he would let him live.

Knowing there was a strong possibility that this man might change his ways, he gave a nod to the weak-willed, sniveling imp cowering next to him. “Yes,” he said in a low, breathy tone. “Kill him.”

The smaller creature’s craven eyes danced with wicked glee. With bony fingers he gripped his spear and spread his leathery wings. “With pleasure, my lord.”

The creature flapped his shriveled wings wildly, barely able to give him lift from his perch on one of the gables. Once he’d reached forty feet above the earth, he lowered his head and plunged downward; his spear ready to pierce through the man’s heart.

Suddenly, lightning split the inky night. Prince Uriel, one of God’s powerful angels stepped from his hiding place. In one swift move, his gleaming sword sliced off the wormy demon’s head. It plopped to the ground with a soft thud and rolled down the hill. A millisecond later, a host of bright, shining angels appeared. Their presence illuminated the night sky and sent the black forces of evil screaming.

With his sword dripping with the creature’s black blood, Prince Uriel guarded his charge until he reached the basement door of the church.

Once the man was safely inside, Uriel released a cautious breath and looked to his leader. “That was close,” he said, wiping the stain from his mighty sword.

Prince Camael, the commander of a legion of angels, gave assent to his friend. “Yes, Prince Uriel. Were it not for the Lord God warning us, this man would be dead by now.”

Prince Uriel, clothed in white array with a golden breastplate, took his place next to his commander. “Has the Almighty told you why it is so vital that this man live?”

His commander shook his head allowing a few braids of silky white hair to fall from under his silver helmet. He widened his stance and stared at the receding forces of evil. “No. I only know

God has a purpose in everything He does. It is always good, and it always amazes me. I look forward to seeing how this will play out. Now take your place. I see movement.”

Oblivious to the unseen battle which had just taken place, the man entered the lower section of the church.

Inhaling a nervous breath, he waited indecisively. *How many of these meetings have I attended over the years only to find myself back where I started?*

After a beat, he stepped inside the brightly lit room and looked around. No one seemed to have noticed him. For that, he was glad. Wearing khaki slacks, a plaid cotton shirt with the sleeves rolled up and loafers, he wondered if he was over-dressed. Seeing a dozen folding chairs, some empty, some taken, he joined the group and took a seat.

At precisely seven o'clock, Emit Ferguson, the group's facilitator, stood. "Welcome everyone to our weekly AA meeting." Glancing around, he paused and smiled. "I see a couple new faces. Before we go over the twelve steps to recovery, would you please introduce yourselves?"

The newcomers exchanged nervous looks.

Finally the man stood. "My name is WD and I'm a drunk!"

A chuckle bubbled up in the throat of the group's facilitator. "Uh sir, we don't call ourselves drunks. We call ourselves alcoholics. Like the sign on the door says, Alcoholics Anonymous," Emit said in an even tone.

Jamming his hands into his pockets, WD said, "But I'm not anonymous," his frustration growing. "My name is WD, that's short for Woodrow Dawson! And I'm not an alcoholic. I'm a drunk!"

That brought a round of laughter from the normally somber group.

"Shh, everyone be quiet," Emit said, trying to quell their mirth. "Sir,"

"And stop calling me sir. That sounds like you're talking to my father. I'm WD or nothing," his voice shook with emotion.

"Why?" asked one of the ladies, a middle-aged housewife with sagging shoulders. "Don't you like your father?"

WD leapt to his feet, his pulse pounding in his ears. "Don't you ever mention my father. He's the reason I'm a drunk in the first place," he said vehemently. Hands shaking, he rubbed the stubble on his chin. "I need a—"

"—We all do mister," another man blurted. "That's why we're here. We drink too much, especially when we're agitated, and you sir, are agitated."

"Yeah, 'the more I drunk, the drinker I get,' someone sang out.

As if on cue, another round of laughter erupted.

WD plopped heavily in the metal chair making it groan under his weight. "I wasn't agitated until you people began badgering me about my past."

The man to WD's left leaned forward and placed his elbows on his knees. "Now we're getting somewhere. What is it about your past that's gotten you so agitated? We're just trying to get to know you."

"Yeah," the first woman said. "You come in here dressed all preppy like you think you're somebody. Why don't you tell us what's really bugging you?"

For a moment, WD sat stunned by the bluntness of her statement. He had his reasons, his secrets, his pain. They all did—even the facilitator. But why single him out? After a beat, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"All right, I confess—"

"—Now we're getting somewhere," Mr. Ferguson, exulted. "First confession, then admission, then recovery. Right group? That's our motto."

The group let out a collective groan. "Yes, first confession, then admission, then recovery," they said in monotonous unison.

"So let's have it," said the large Black-American man to his right.

It wasn't a request.