

As the world hurtles toward the end of the church age, spiritual warfare heats up. The End Times War is a literary investigation of this spiritual warfare and its effect on the life of one young man.

Gathering Shadows: Book One of the End Times War

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# **End Times War Book One:**

**Gathering Shadows**

**by William L. Tullar**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **KAY AFTON**

Chris Burrelle leaned his chin on his elbow and looked up at the wall clock again. The piles of surveys lying before him on the table were calling him back, but as he often was, Chris was far, far away. He had been staring off into the distance trying to sort out a life that had become all too complicated of late. He was a young man of twenty who found himself wedged squarely between two women pulling hard in opposite directions.

First, there was Kay Afton. She was almost ten years his senior. She was his marketing instructor at Pine Ridge State University. He had gotten an undergraduate research assistantship in the business administration department - - and he had been elated to get it. He remembered how he had whooped and hollered when he received the letter telling him that he had gotten the appointment. The research assistantship had been a great experience for him. He had learned things by doing that he could never have learned in class . . . well, that last part was for sure. As he had begun to work with his instructor, she began to come on to him. Chris had always been rather shy with girls, and he found himself embarrassed often by the things Mrs. Afton had suggested to him. Besides that, he had some misgivings about carrying on with a married woman. However, Kay Afton was a persuasive woman, and she had insisted that she and her husband had permanently split up. According to her, they were just waiting out the full year until the divorce proceedings could start.

Still, Chris had resisted her advances for some time. She was certainly attractive - - some would have said beautiful. Kay Afton was ash blonde, tall, and built like a model. Her advances were subtle and clever since she was light years more sexually advanced than Chris. Before Kay, he had never known a woman's love. It was a strange, tense relationship. She was clearly in control, and Chris was clearly not. He never knew from one moment to the next where she was coming from. Sometimes she insisted on maintaining the instructor/student relationship: Structuring, distant, demanding, and even overbearing. Then at other times, she

was the sex kitten from a young boy's fantasy. Theirs was not really a relationship. It was more like Chris was temporarily fulfilling a need. He had the distinct feeling that as soon as someone better and more mature came along, he would be history.

The woman pulling in the opposite direction for him was Elizabeth Avery. Beth. She was just twenty years old. Like Chris, she was also a junior at Pine Ridge State, majoring in business administration. Beth was also somewhat forward, but not like Kay Afton, of course. She and Chris had seen each other at a couple of school functions. Chris had some time ago seen that Beth was the keeper of the two. She was his age, a student, and her interests were more like his. That could be a long-term relationship except that Chris had not even asked her out yet. He knew he would have to screw up his courage in order to take the risk and ask for a date. Somehow, he had not yet found sufficient courage or opportunity.

The first problem that occupied Chris's mind as he stared at the wall was getting out of his relationship with Kay Afton. He was her undergraduate research assistant for the spring, summer, and the fall. He needed the money, needed the grades, and needed the course credit he would receive if he were to graduate the following spring. That was the problem. She had things he wanted. He could not just tell her it was over. Actually, he had been agonizing about it enough that he had confided in his roommates about his quandary. Chris did not know his roommates, Jeff and Buddy, all that well, and they certainly had never shared any of their intimate problems with him. However, he was hopelessly confused as to how to extricate himself, and he needed a sounding board. This was not the kind of situation that mom would understand!

His reflections were suddenly interrupted by Kay Afton padding up the hall from her bedroom where she had been working on her computer. "That's it for today, Chris. You have to go. I've got to go get Michelle. But before you go, though, I have something for you."

Chris rubbed his blonde ringlets with an ink-stained hand. Was this a new come on or a genuine request? "Gee, Mrs. Afton, you didn't have to do . . ."

"Well, it's not a present Chris. It's just a little keepsake I have. I need you to hold it for me."

“But why?” Chris was thinking how this little trinket might complicate his situation even more.

“Well let’s just say that it’s liable to start trouble between me and my ex if he finds it here. I wouldn’t put it past him to break in sometime when I’m not here and go through all the drawers. Would you keep it for me? Just for a few weeks. Once our divorce is finalized, I’ll take it back.” She gave him the little box. “Now put this some place safe, and I’ll tell you when I need it.”

Chris took the proffered box and put it in his pocket without looking at it. He thought, “If I don’t look at it, it won’t add to the problem. “

Then he said, “I know a good place to put this where I won’t forget it. Well, I need to go study. I’ve got an accounting test this week.”

Kay kissed him on the cheek. “Take care of yourself, Chris. See you tomorrow.”

Chris sensed her need to hurry, so he headed for the front door. “Thanks again for getting me in on the flea market project, Mrs. Afton. I’m really enjoying it and learning a lot. See ya!” Saying that, he disappeared out the front door into the July heat.

It was a little before six on that afternoon when Kay Afton finally gathered up her daughter Michelle from her preschool. She got home to her apartment in the Stone's Throw complex about five fifteen. She parked her aging Volkswagen bug in its usual place. As she looked out over the parking lot, she could see the heat, rising in ripples off the softening blacktop. Stone's Throw is one of those complexes where the buildings are sandwiched between strips of blacktop. It certainly was not the high rent district, but it was the best that Kay could do. Though she was earning a modest salary from the University, she needed to get the divorce settlement with some alimony and child support money in order to afford a better standard of living.

As usual, as soon as Michelle got out of her child safety seat, she bolted for the front door. Kay had told her repeatedly not to run in the parking lot, but that was a lesson she refused to learn. As Michelle ran away from her, Kay opened her mouth to shout at the

scurrying figure but then shook her head. It was just too hot and humid to do that now. Just the distance between the car and her front door dampened her blouse.

As she crossed the parking lot to her apartment, Kay looked over at the building across the street. She could see them. They were still up there, sitting in front of the picture window, staring at her. She did not know all of them, but she did know that Winston Sutton was the guy whose name was on the rental contract. He was one of her husband's cronies, a short, middle-aged lecher with a paunch, balding pate, and bad teeth. He had a look that made women cringe. It is said that the eyes are the windows of the soul, and Winston's soul appeared in those eyes as clearly as closed captioning on a big screen TV. What they communicated was lecherous desire.

There were several female members in the group as well, but they were not present that afternoon. Selma and Katy were the two that Kay had met. They were both very strange people. Selma was middle-aged, overweight, with a head topped by a shock of frowsy brown hair. There was something about her eyes too . . . something cold and clammy. Katy on the other hand was a young teenager. She had obviously been born with a hair lip. It had been surgically repaired, but not very successfully. How she fit in that group, Kay had never been able to fathom.

Then there seemed to be a variable crowd in that apartment. Strange transients passed through and were never seen again. They were a bad lot. The group members called themselves the "Black Spot." Kay had never been sure what they had in common with her husband, David, except that they all gave her the creeps. There are three things that separate mortals from understanding what the truth is, the flesh, the world, and the Devil. The first two were sufficient for Kay Afton, and the third was sufficient for her husband David and most all his friends.

Kay opened her front door. Michelle scooted into the cool interior. As quickly as Kay was able, she got inside, slid the deadbolt closed, and put the chain on the door. Blonde haired, blue-eyed Michelle kept insisting that she was hungry, and Kay, stuck for something better, gave her a sandwich slice of cheese. She told Michelle to turn on Barney on the TV.

Flailing the cheese, Michelle disappeared into the living room and switched on the TV. As Kay turned her attention toward thoughts of dinner, she fished in the refrigerator for something to drink and her attention rested to the open bottle of Chablis standing in the rack on the refrigerator door. She extracted the bottle and poured herself a glass, thinking all the while about what to cook for dinner. Michelle would be satisfied with the cheese and was, in any case, a terribly fussy eater. What could she cook that would please her three year old? She switched on her CD player. "What to play? What to play?" She said aloud as she pawed through the plastic covers of her rather substantial collection of CDs. She settled on oldies. She found one of her old Black Sabbath CDs and mounted it in the player. As the opening notes of "Iron man" thundered in her ears, carefree youth returned.

Still pondering the dinner menu, Kay Afton pulled her diary out of the kitchen drawer and began to make her entry for July 26 in the little powder blue book. 'I have almost finished all the data for the Flea Market Survey. It has been a huge job, and I don't know how I would have done it if it hadn't been for Chris. He has been so earnest and such a help, I almost feel ashamed the way I'm using him . . . They're still watching me. I don't know who Winston Sutton has got over there now, but they're watching my door as if they expect something to happen. Frankly, they make my flesh crawl. I wish I could move to another apartment, but I can't afford it just now. Besides, they would probably just follow me. I'm almost certain David is watching me. I see him occasionally. He is now a complete psychopath. There really is nothing he won't do. I'm afraid of what he might be planning to do to me and to Michelle.'

Kay had kept this little diary since her break up with David. It helped her to chronicle all the events that happened and to make sense out of them. More than that, she wrote the diary with the vague notion that if something happened to her that there would be a record and that record would point to David Afton as the most likely perpetrator of any crime against her. She was afraid of him and could never escape his long reach, no matter what she did. For that very reason, Kay was determined that there would be a written record that would point to him. So great was her suspicion of him that she had started making photocopies of her diary and



keeping them in her office at work. She even occasionally mailed copies to her old home address in care of her mother so that there would be a record with an official date on it.

Absentmindedly, she glanced at the answering machine, and seeing the message button lit with three calls taken, she pressed play. She had not been gone half an hour and there were three messages. There was Pat Lansford, the business administration department secretary, calling to tell her that she needed to sign her new health insurance paperwork. She was relatively new to teaching at the university, and so she made a note for herself to be sure to ask Pat for the paperwork tomorrow. Then, there was a message from Margie Streeter telling her the dress that she was having altered was ready. Last, there was a message from him. David. Her husband. Soon to be ex-husband. The sound of his even voice made the hairs on the nape of her neck stand up.

The message began with a long sigh. "Just wanted to let you know that I'm coming for you . . . coming for you . . . coming for you soon. It won't be long now. Embrace the fear. Revel in the terror. The end is near. Very near." That brought her bolt upright. She listened intently for almost a full minute -- the way hunters do when they are listening for the steps of a big cat. She held her breath. Hearing nothing, she exhaled a sigh of relief. Kay got up and took a quick turn around the apartment. She looked in the bathroom, the closets. Nothing. No one was there, and there was no sign that anyone had been there. Nothing had been disturbed. The threat was still echoing in her mind. It wasn't the first time he had threatened her life. As they came to the end of the mandatory year-long separation period, the threats were getting scarier. When David threatened, it was believable. He was frightening because he did not feel himself bound by the rules that govern ordinary people. He had done some violent, nasty things to Kay already. People who had heard Kay's accounts of him agreed that David was a psychopath - - laws, norms, and conventional behavior were for other people. David Afton did as he pleased when he pleased.

Kay returned to the living room to check on Michelle. She was happily engrossed in the Purple Dinosaur, and Kay went back to the kitchen to think about dinner again. Then she

crossed to the front door and checked the bolt and safety chain. Here it was not even dark yet, and Kay was already locking her door.

So much had happened in the past six months. She had finished her MBA degree at the university and because the department head of the business administration department, Dr. Charles Lanz, had liked her so much he had offered her a job as an instructor. Kay had been a student in his class, and several presentations she had made were so good that he felt she really ought to be in front of the class instead of sitting in it.

For her part, Kay really wanted the job. It was crucial because her dad had recently passed away, and her mom was still trying to get the estate cleared up and could not support her and Michelle. David knew that and played on it. He knew she really had nowhere to go. He had abused her and then taunted her, “Where will you go then? Back to momma? No way, she can’t take you, precious. You have to stay here and be a really good girl. If you’re really good, there won’t be any need for any more of these ‘therapy’ sessions.”

She had needed the job to get away from David. When he was angry with her, which was often, he was frightening. If Michelle cried or said anything during one of their bouts, he smacked her around too. David Afton had a foul temper, and once it was roused, it might be days before he was reasonable again.

At first, their marriage had been good. David had a beardless but very handsome face. He was a man that other women often showed an active interest in. In fact, David, a dentist by profession, had gotten a number of dental hygienists to come to work for him strictly on his appearance. He soon lost them because David frightened them too. He was charming. In casual conversation, he knew all the right things to say, and he could be very persuasive. However, when he did not get his way, when someone crossed him, when someone took something he wanted, when someone looked too long at his wife, he was pure poison. His was not a measured response either. When the switch was tripped, he simply went berserk.

In her pensive moments, Kay had always pondered how David could be a successful dentist. She acknowledged that he managed superficial relationships well. Anyway, she told herself, Josef Mengele, the Nazi concentration camp doctor, had managed to finish medical

school and see patients. David usually said and did the right things around people he barely knew. Acquaintances never knew that David liked inflicting pain. He actually seemed to have a sadistic fixation on others' pain. Kay knew from personal experience that he found it sexually exciting. Curiously, even after he hurt his dental patients, they still came back to him. It was almost as if he had an hypnotic hold on them.

To an outsider, their marriage might have seemed like Ken and Barbie. Kay had been a cheerleader at State University. She was tall, stately, and blonde. She knew that men often followed her with their eyes longingly. The marriage to David had seemed like the right answer – Kay was a trophy wife, beautiful and charming. Outsiders did not know what it was like to live in the same house with a psychopath. Kay soon discovered his foul temper. When that temper was stirred, he was capable of all manner of nasty things. In addition, as their marriage progressed past its first month, he began to demand sexual things out of the ordinary. At first, it was just odd positions and places. Then, he began to want fantasy, other people involved, bondage, and finally he began to want pain involved – but always her pain.

Kay had tried at first to comply and please him. Compliance made life easier given his temper. He kept a number of guns and knives in the house, and he was perfectly capable of employing them in a suggestive manner as if to say, "either you cooperate and do what I want, or some terrible accident could happen to you."

Then there was the Black Spot. She had not known he was a Black Spot member until she moved into Stone's Throw. If she had known he was a Black Spot member before their marriage, she would surely not have married him. That collection of weirdoes wasn't even invited to their wedding. They had played a silent role in her marriage, and now, whenever she looked across the parking lot, there they were in that big picture window, staring back at her. That in itself was unnerving.

Black Spot usually met on Friday afternoons. When David had come back from those meetings, he was high - almost as if he had been drinking or smoking dope - he was ebullient and giggly. What they did at those meetings, Kay never knew. She had met Katy and Selma,

two of the female Black Spot members, and she did not want any part of any of them. She actively avoided meeting any of the rest of David's friends.

Kay's size and athletic ability were all that had saved her when David was angry. David was almost six feet tall himself, and he was powerfully built. The first time he had actually punched her, she hit him back right in the eye. The blow had caught him off balance and actually knocked him down. Kay was incensed, but when the blow knocked him over, she was almost afraid she had hurt him. When he got up, he went berserk. His eyes went red. Out of his mouth came a steady stream of the vilest cursing she had ever heard. Just looking him in the face, Kay was struck with fear. He kicked and punched her until she ran from their house bruised and bleeding. She spent that night with her friend Nancy Kessel, but the incident began a pattern. David would get in one of his moods. Then something would set him off, and Kay was always the target.

Before Michelle was born, she had hoped that David would settle down if he became a father. For a time, it almost seemed to work that way. Then, after the initial euphoria of the baby, he became moody and withdrawn. It seemed as if the tiniest little thing would send him into full berserk mode. If David drank alcohol, even a little, he was prone to violent temper. With just a few beers, he would say or do almost anything.

Kay bore it as best she could as long as she could. She took it for almost five full years. At age 29, She already bore on her body the scars of abuse. When she got her MBA and could manage it, she took Michelle and moved out. At first, the separation seemed to mellow David. Later, he became obsessed with the idea that Kay was seeing other men. Although he had consented to the separation, he had said several times he would not grant her a divorce. He insisted that he was not through with her yet.

The truth was that there had been other men. In the eight months since their separation, Kay had been lonely. With only a toddler for company, most women need adult companionship. Kay was extroverted and friendly by nature, so it was natural that she struck up a friendship with one of her fellow faculty members, a marketing professor named Alan Williams. Alan was certainly nothing special to look at, especially compared to David. He

was quiet, even tempered and a wonderful conversationalist. The trouble with Alan was that he was gay. Kay liked him a lot, but she understood that there would never be anything physical between them. However, a kind of platonic, protective relationship had grown up. Kay provided cover for Alan who had not come out of the closet and never would. Most of his colleagues and coworkers assumed he was gay, but they never put him in the position of having to “come out.”

On the other hand, Alan provided cover for Kay. She had an escort when she needed one, and she had short affairs with various men who struck her fancy and met her need. Because of her entanglement with David, she was not looking for long-term relationships, just temporary satisfaction.

Alan helped run interference for Kay in the Business Administration Department, and he fixed things around her apartment when they broke. He was also a great help in decorating. When she had requested aid in getting her apartment set up, Alan had been right there to help. Kay had a particular attraction for clean-shaven, hairless men anyway. She found her sexual outlets elsewhere.

On this hot July night, Alan had gone to Florida on a consulting trip. Kay had not really seen him much in a couple of weeks because she had been busy with summer school, and Alan was busy with a research project and a consulting engagement. They had been ships passing in the night.

As Kay got out the frozen macaroni and cheese dinner, the phone rang. It was Alan:

"Hey, Alan. How hot is the sunshine state?" she asked.

"Well it was great until I got back to the motel tonight," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Kay, sit down. No, I mean it. Sit down. Are you sitting?"

"Yes, I'm sitting." She replied slumping into a kitchen chair.

"When I came home tonight, someone left a dead pig on my bed with a note. The note says, 'Stay away from Kay, you stinking little fag.' Now it's not signed, but it doesn't have to be. This has to be David's work."

Kay chewed pensively on her thumb. "Well, he's certainly capable of doing that, and the note sounds like something he'd write, but he's here in town."

"Have you seen him today?" Alan asked.

"Well, no, but he left me a threatening message on my answering machine. His car was in the parking lot yesterday. Besides, I'm pretty sure he's still clearing up stuff from closing his practice."

"Maybe he's not down here," Alan continued, "but I don't mind telling you this has really spooked me. I'm going to change hotels. In fact, I think I'll do it right now. Listen, Kay, I'll call you back after I move. Take care of yourself and bolt your door. Maybe this is all bluster. I hope. . ." Without another word, he hung up.

Despairing of actually cooking dinner, Kay heated up the macaroni and cheese in the microwave and fixed herself a salad. As Ozzie Osborn intoned the virtues of mayhem from the CD player, Kay sat down at the kitchen table and got Michelle to do the same. Michelle had lost her appetite from the piece of cheese before dinner. She picked and poked at the macaroni til Kay despaired of getting her to eat it. By the time she got the dishes done and the kitchen cleaned up, it was time for Michelle's bath. Michelle poked though the bath hour, and insisted on a bedtime story. Kay resigned herself to one more run-through of *The Cat in the Hat*. Of course, Michelle knew the whole book by heart, so there was no possibility of skipping pages. Kay had been through it so many times that she knew all of the poem by heart, and she recited effortlessly, providing additional sound effects where necessary. She kissed Michelle and turned out the light.

As she walked out into the hallway dimly lit from the setting sun, she sensed the presence. Dark shadows had infiltrated her apartment, and their sheer numbers lent oppression to the place that was tangible. You could not see their forms directly. They were transparent, thin, wraith-like. They were something you might catch out of the corner of your eye, the merest flicker passing in front of a light.

A thrill of terror passed through her lithe body. "They" were here. She had always felt that "they" were David's companions and servants, maybe his alter ego - - shadowy things,

night things, not from the physical world but things out of another dimension. The terror of their choking presence welled up in her throat. She had always feared “they” would come for her.

A thought struck her as she headed for the living room, and she detoured into her bedroom. Under her pillow, she kept a bayonet. It was her dad’s war trophy from Viet Nam. She withdrew the bayonet from its scabbard and ran her thumb across its keen edge. If this was it, she was going to do some damage first. Then, the thought that what they really wanted was Michelle flashed through her mind. There was something about little girls . . . well, they might do that, but it would be over her dead body! Brandishing the bayonet purposefully in front of her, she edged slowly back into the living room.

There in the middle of the living room stood her husband, David! He was dressed in a long white robe and had surgical gloves on.

Kay was stunned. Her eyes scanned the room trying to see how he had entered the apartment. "How did you get in?" She demanded. The bayonet involuntarily pointed at David’s vitals. She bent slightly forward in a position where she could spring if she needed to. She had been through this before. The end of the bayonet danced as her hand trembled with fear and rage.

"Doors and walls can’t keep me out." He replied in a calm voice.

"Well, get out right now." Her eyes narrowed into slits and her nostrils flared. She wagged the bayonet purposefully. “You may approach me at your own risk, David Afton. Nothing would suit me better right now than to slit your gut and have it be self-defense. I could cheerfully watch you bleed to death and then call the police. I’d wait a good long time first, too.”

"You won’t be calling anyone anytime soon. I have your cell phone here in my pocket, and I cut the phone cord --- you won’t call anybody. As far as you’re cutting my gut, I’m sure you would if you could, my sweet, but you won’t get the chance. You might say I’ve brought help along.”

"David, I don't care what you have brought with you. We are equals you and I. I'm staying here. Michelle is staying here. You live somewhere else. Please go there right now. Get a life David. Stop bothering me. What we had is long gone. It was a mistake, a terrible, terrible mistake. I have been so relieved not to live with you these past eight months. Go away and don't come back." Kay was flushed with rage, and she raised the bayonet as if to strike him.

Then as had happened before, his eyes went red. He looked at her with cold contempt. A stream of the vilest cursing came out of his mouth, and then he seemed to calm down. "If I can't have you, then no one else will," he said with a level voice.

She cocked her elbow preparing to strike him with all her might. At this, he took a step back. Behind him, the air seemed to shimmer a little and a form materialized slowly.

Kay stared as if mesmerized. Then, she came to her senses and took a step backwards. She turned and ran pell-mell down the hall and quickly locked herself in the bathroom. Frantically, she fumbled with the stool in an attempt to brace the door, but before she could get it in place, the door burst from its hinges in pieces. The top fragment of the door struck Kay in the head, and she slumped backwards into the still wet tub. He fell on her with the knife. Knowing the anatomy perfectly, he stabbed her repeatedly in places that would not be instantly fatal. Then, after several minutes of stab wounds here and there, like a matador before the bleeding bull, he aimed the knife carefully at her heart and plunged it into her. She went limp, and David Afton stood up. There was blood everywhere. He surveyed the scene in the bathroom and nodded his satisfaction. He took the bayonet and put it in a plastic bag, letting the blood smudge as he did so. He dipped his finger in her blood and marked the wall with the sign. Under the pentagram he wrote, 'My hour is at hand!'

He removed his surgical gown, gloves, and hat slowly and carefully, placing them in a plastic bag he had brought for that purpose. Then, he pulled out a roll of adhesive tape. He cut pieces of the tape and went down to Michelle's bedroom. As he approached, she awoke, shrieking in horror. After the first scream, he stuck the tape over her mouth. She struggled, fought, and cried. He taped her arms behind her. He taped her ankles together. He looked at



his watch, “Nine thirty,” he said aloud. “Right on schedule.” David wrapped the child in her blanket. Picking Michelle up in the crook of his arm, he walked deliberately out the front door of the apartment to his car. He tossed the blanket and its contents into the back seat of his waiting car and returned to the apartment to leave it the way he had planned. There were some things he had to find.

Joe Flores was sitting on a balcony across the street with another Black Spot member. They had their front row seats. As they sat there at the patio table, sipping Hurricanes, they saw David stride purposefully out the front door and toss the little body into his car. Joe looked at his watch. “Right on time, too,” he intoned.

His cell phone buzzed. His lawyer was working late. He was calling with the latest changes in demands his wife was making on their divorce settlement. Joe ran his hands through his thinning, gray hair. His ex-wife was determined to make this divorce as ugly as possible. He sighed and picked up his drink. What would she think of next?

\* \* \* \* \*

*The larger demon leaned over the smaller, and his eyes glowed a deeper shade of red. His skin fell in folds, in blotchy shades of dark reds and purples. He was puffy, wheezing, foul smelling. He was, to human eyes, incredibly hideous. However, in the lowerarchy of Hell, hideous is beautiful. His appearance had, in fact, secured for him his present position.*

*The smaller, Slimebody by name, was reporting. “Just as he was leaving, just as he got up to go, we were attacked.”*

*Glucose, his superior, looked skeptical. “Attacked? Who attacked you? We’ve seen almost no host activity here.”*

*“Well, sir, I don’t know about the level of host activity here, but I can tell you, we were hanging there, watching them wind up a dull day - - we hadn’t been able to get anything good going at all. They just worked all day and never responded to any of the good suggestions we showed them. Just as he got up to go, they came screaming in. I think there might have been an archangel leading the attack. The formation was an archangel formation.”*

*Glucose was even more disbelieving. "An archangel? Your patient?" He said these last words with real contempt in his voice. "What makes you think you're doing anything an archangel would be interested in? You're not even a tempter first class. I'm sure it wasn't an archangel. Listen, I called you in here to do you a special favor. I trust you will remember who your real friends are, Slimebody." Slimebody, though smaller than Glucose, was also frightening to look at. He was misshapen from frequent beatings, limped distinctly when he walked, and exuded an odor that was as visible as steam from a boiling pot. True to his name, he left a slime trail wherever he went. The big demon continued, "You will remember that it was I that got you Christopher Burrelle as your patient. That meant you got to see the Kay Afton murder with a front row seat. And what a treat that was!"*

*Slimebody muttered something barely audible about almost being dismembered for the honor.*

*Glucose looked around furtively as if he were about to tell Slimebody a deep, dark secret. "I have been directed by Destroyer to give you your explanations in writing as well as verbally. Apparently, something particularly big is afoot, and you, even though you are a nobody, are going to be right in the middle. I mention this to advise you to be on your toes and not let up on your patient. While it looked for a while as if your patient was of no consequence at all, it seems now that he may be more important than I first thought when I assigned you to him."*

*The smaller demon looked attentive. He muttered something inaudible about 'responsibility without any authority or power.'*

*Glucose continued, "I know that you and your cronies down in the Haw Principality are greatly cheered over this delightful murder. I must say that I am particularly pleased with the ritual -- it has heartened the hordes immensely. Our Black Spot humans also found it a real treat, even though they didn't get front row seats." At this, he rubbed his hands eagerly and smiled a broad hideous smile. "This is essential here in the Bible belt. However, I note in passing that Slumtrimpet was decorated for his management of the patient Kay Afton. No less than Baal Rastafar is involved with overseeing this situation. That's why the results were*

*perfect. Destroyer is taking an active interest in our section these days. Our Father Below has issued personal commendations for all of the participants. He did mention you specifically, but only to remind me not to let you bungle your patient."*

*This last statement was lie. A citation had arrived with Slimebody's name on it, but Glucose was withholding it until Slimebody produced some good results he could report. He continued: "Apparently, the Father wants assurances that you are up to the task. I assured him you were. You won't let me down, will you?" The voice was wheedling and whiny.*

*Licking his lips and rubbing his hands again, he continued. "Your patient has to this point never been more than lukewarm about HIM with lots of vague ideas about God being good and all. Right now I see from your report that you have worked him into an almost agnostic position - - if there is a god, and we really can't know if there is, but if there is, he surely is a big Santa Claus in the sky. See that you keep him there. Keep telling him that church is where we go for weddings and funerals. Don't ever let him ask why. As long as he feels he is a good person doing good wherever he can, our task is simple. Just keep him where he is, and he will be ours forever."*

*Glucose paused. "There is some evidence that Scabwort's section is not cooperating fully. Their tempters are working at odds with ours. Sometimes they're suggesting the opposite things we suggest to our patients. Sometimes we're seeing them freelance with our patients. I have a long history with Scabwort. He's been a problem before. If any of you has any trouble with him or with any of the demons in K section, come and tell me. I will not tolerate any freelancing."*

*"By the way, I'm putting Sneer in for a commendation for his handling of Alan Williamson in this matter. I thought the dead pig was a stroke of genius – that'll teach that little faggot to keep his distance! The cost was so minimal too. We didn't have to compromise any operation to have it put right where it would do the most good. It did frighten him so! I confess I just love it when they freeze in terror." He chortled heartily and guffawed.*

*"On the other hand, Slimebody, I see from your report here that you have let your patient meet a Campus Outreach for Christ leader on his college campus. You must stop that*

*relationship now! It is imperative that you suggest to him as soon as possible as often as possible that Campus Outreach is for wackos, weirdoes, and toothless fundamentalists. Let him think that if he joins, he'll have to pray all the time and end up being a missionary to the Sudan. Tell him that repeatedly. You can also use images of his college professors expressing their disdain for Christianity in general and Campus Outreach in particular. A few well-placed suggestions will keep him out of their clutches. I also note in passing that you suspect that he used to pray at night before he goes to bed. I know you couldn't hear what he was saying because the Enemy always protects these little tête-à-têtes with the vermin, but you can tell if he's praying or not. You need to make sure that doesn't start again. Prayer can be used by us, but it's tricky. Certainly, effective use of prayer for our ends is a skill out of your league. You keep him away from those Campus Outreach vermin and Our Father Below will end up commending you. Of course, they'll give him to you or at least part of him, anyway."*

*The smaller demon merely nodded as if he were agreeing with the whole monologue. He knew that old Glubose would have his say no matter what. It was just as well to endure him. Certainly, he was a frightful bore, puffed up and self-important. But, that did not matter. He was the section chief, and he was to be obeyed, at least when he was looking.*

*Glubose pressed on, "It just isn't fair. We have the inferior numbers. We are spread so thin. In so many instances we have low skilled tempters like you, Slimebody, in critical positions. We are all afraid that our days are numbered, and even our Father Below doesn't always seem to believe we shall prevail. It's all so unfair. The Enemy has all the advantages. We must be valiant, Slimebody. Valiant. We must fight on and give a good account of ourselves even if we must lose in the end. Confidentially, I think we're coming to one of those points of history when the battle between us and the host will be critical. There is a turning point coming. The shadows are gathering. For some time now, we have been on the offensive. There are islands of His light out there, but we own all the shadows in between. Watch your section, Slimebody. If you see any Host activity that is the least bit out of the ordinary, you must report it at once. Most of all, don't let your patient slip away. To fail now would be disastrous for you - even though we need all the able bodies possible. Be on your guard. Our*

*William L. Tullar*

*hour is at hand.” With that, Glubose vanished leaving a little wisp of smoke behind where he had been standing.*

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