

*A former Army Officer, Jeremy Spencer, turned preacher, finds himself in a battle with otherworldly visitors. Amid grief and loss he finds love again in Jaime. Now he must risk sacrificing everything for their legacy.*

## **L.I.A.R. (Love Is Always Right)**

By Michael A. Lockwood

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**L.I.A.R.**

**Love Is Always Right**

**MICHAEL A. LOCKWOOD**



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Scripture references in this book are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV).

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## Chapter Fifteen

*“An unjust peace is better than a just war.”*

— Cicero

It was an opportunity that might not come again.

America was reeling, grappling not only with the devastation from the Cascade and Olympic Volcanic eruptions but also with a massive border crisis driven by the fleeing masses from Central America’s northern triangle. On top of that, a manufactured virus from China had virtually crippled the country’s economy. The pandemic had spiraled out of control, affecting his populace too—but he knew he could capitalize on the chaos to restore Russia to its former glory.

The icing on the cake, of course, was America’s weak administration, compounded by the disgraceful withdrawal from Afghanistan, which had shattered its credibility on the world stage and eroded the confidence of its allies.

For months, President Maksim Zalinski had been ordering his Russian troops toward the Balkans and Ukraine. He additionally ordered his military to set up false-flag operations within those countries. His sympathizers within their governments had begun to sow turmoil while paid mercenaries carried out border incursions to frame them as aggressors. It was costly, though. Some within those regions might agree with reunification, but they were weak—and capitalists at heart, always wanting more

money to perform tasks that should have been done out of loyalty to the greater good.

Even his uneasy allies, the Chinese, sensed the opportunity. His intelligence service had tracked their preparations for retaking Taiwan and their bolstered actions in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands. America was staggering, and the world knew it.

He entered the office where his cabinet waited, taking his place at the head of the table. He could see their worry and, beneath it, their expectations.

“Comrades, gentlemen. The United States and its allies have walled us in for far too long, supporting the destruction of our union,” President Zalinski pronounced. “You know my will and my resolve: to restore our country’s glorious status on the world stage.”

It was time. The world had had enough of these egocentric Americans. Their power and influence needed to be humbled. Now, with the natural disaster on the West Coast rocking them on their heels, it was an opportunity he and his allies could seize. Even the resources of their allies were strained and diverted to aid their long-time benefactor.

Major Kirill Morozov burst into the room, rushing to the head of the table to hand him a communiqué. The leader scowled, ready to chastise—no, fire—the officer for the interruption. That is until he saw what had been handed to him.

“Show him in,” he ordered simply.

Moments later, a diminutive figure from the Eniquitus race was escorted into the room. And just like that, all the military plans and power grabs—designed to exploit a distracted and weakened superpower—came to a sudden halt: not just a slow, grinding halt but a soundless, frozen crash as the whole world looked to them.

## Chapter Nineteen

*“Love is like climbing a mountain; the journey can be tough, but the view from the top makes it all worthwhile.”*

—Unknown

Jeremy arrived at the Two Cats restaurant a little after seven. It was quiet, as one would expect for a Wednesday morning. The air had a crispness to it, but not uncomfortably so — perfect for a day of hiking in Acadia.

He stood outside, by the wooden sign marking the café and bed-and-breakfast, waiting. *Cute place*, he mused. The building was painted yellow with silver and black accents, and the sign featured two black silhouetted cats standing on their hind legs, playfully swiping at each other. Silver tables and blue plastic chairs were scattered across the deck, their arrangement casual and inviting. Jeremy decided it was time to go in and get a seat.

The bell above the door jingled as he entered, greeted by the light smile of a somewhat rotund hostess. “How many?”

“Two,” Jeremy responded, holding up two fingers.

“Inside or outside?”

“Inside. It’s a little brisk today.”

The hostess led him to a small table with red and green chairs. “Coffee?”

“Absolutely.”

“Cream?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said with a smile.

After handing him the menu, the waitress clicked her heels and did a quick about-face, returning moments later with two mugs of coffee and a dish of creamer cups. As she set them down, the bell rang again, announcing another customer.

The hostess crossed the room. “Hi, how many?”

“I’m with him,” Jaime smiled and gestured toward Jeremy.

He stood and pulled out the chair for her. She paused to give him a quick hug and a peck on the cheek before sitting. Her perfume caught his attention—vanilla, with a buttery undertone. It smelled like home.

“Well?” Jaime asked, pulling his attention back.

Jeremy furrowed his brow.

“I asked if you’d been here long?”

“Not long. Just enough to order the coffee. It’s going to be a gorgeous day for a hike.”

“It is.”

Jaime was dressed for it. She wore dark yoga pants, a short-sleeve aqua T-shirt, and a lightweight down vest, which could be folded and hooked to her belt if the day warmed up. A water bottle attached to a lanyard rested on her hip. Her shoes weren’t hiking boots but a pair of Swiss-made Ons—comfortable and stylish, even if they weren’t ideal for rugged trails.



The waitress returned to take their order. Jeremy opted for the smoked trout omelet with red onions, dill, and a creamy horseradish cheddar sauce, while Jaime went more traditional with eggs benedict.

By the time they finished breakfast, the sun had warmed the day.

They drove in Jeremy's car, heading to Acadia National Park—a place Jeremy held close, with fond memories of visiting with Helen and the boys. Today, he and Jaime had decided to tackle the Ladder Trail Loop, a three-mile hike known for its stone steps and three steel ladders embedded in the rocks.

Ever the gentleman, Jeremy stopped short as they approached the trailhead, silently letting Jaime take the lead.

Jeremy found it difficult not to admire her figure as she moved ahead. For being nearly forty, she had kept herself in fantastic shape—shapely, without being overly round. Her triceps flexed as she pulled herself along the railing that lined the stone steps, beads of sweat forming on her lightly tanned neck beneath her dark brown hair, most of which was tucked into a baseball cap. Jaime glanced back with a grin.

“Not going too fast for you, am I?”

He chuckled. “Not at all.” *Every man's battle*, he thought to himself.

They eventually reached the summit of Dorr Mountain, 1,270 feet above sea level. They paused to take in the sweeping views of Mount Desert Narrows and southward to the Cranberry Islands. The sweat that had formed on Jeremy's back and

forehead quickly dried in the breeze, leaving a tightness on his brow.

For a moment, they stood in silence, absorbing the beauty around them. Then Jaime grabbed him, pulling him into a hug and kissing him on the cheek, the corner of her lips brushing against his.

“Thank you for this,” she exclaimed. “It’s gorgeous.”

His heart skipped a beat. *What a flirt*, he thought, his mind lingering on the deliberately misplaced kiss.

## Chapter Twenty-One

*“Depression is not a sign of weakness. It means  
you have been strong for too long.”*

— Unknown

It was one in the morning; he had woken because the monster had reared its ugly head again. That dark thing caused him to weep uncontrollably at any moment, threatening to consume his life. In the dim light, his wife arose and placed her arms around him, trying in vain to console him. She didn't understand it. Throughout his life, he had been stoic and in control. But these many months, control had become elusive. He sobbed for probably ten minutes more, his wife staying close. Wiping his face, he said, “Go back to sleep, honey.” She sighed and returned to her side of the bed.

Rubio Gonzales was a faithful man but an unhappy one. He didn't understand it himself. He felt unfulfilled and without purpose. At sixty-two years old, he had been married for a little over thirty years. His children were grown and successful businessmen. He himself had had a meaningful career, and now he was retired. Without goals, he felt listless and purposeless. His thoughts were constantly centered around escape. He wanted to run, leaving nothing but scorched earth and burning the little empire he had created for himself and his family. He wanted something else: to live differently, to love differently,

and to exist differently. How could he explain this to his wife and children? He felt trapped by the life he had built. He was responsible and bore the burdens of responsibility that come with being the patriarch, the leader, the worker, and the advisor for those around him.

He rose from his sitting position on the bed and headed to the living room. It was not that he did not love his wife or children. He absolutely didn't want to hurt them in any way, and yet, still, he wanted to escape. To run someplace far away and start anew. How would anyone understand? No one would, of course. They would say he was wrong, and, well, he knew he was wrong. The ramifications would be severe. His kids would hate him, his wife would be torn apart, and the home they created would be in cinders. But ultimately, they would survive, he surmised. Would he? He was not so sure. Life for him had become a chain of burdens. Perhaps this is what life is about—acquiring burdens. It is through these burdens the world measures your worth. *That's it, he thought. We don't build things; we accrue burdens. These burdens enslave us to the world through ideas like respect, maturity, and growth. It SUCKS*, he screamed in his mind.

He had many times thought of just leaving the world. How easy it would be. No one would see it coming. He was respected. He appeared to be sound in mind and body. It would shock everyone he knew. Once, he almost took the leap, he mused. It was when he and his wife were on a cruise. She had been asking for a vacation. A cruise was easy. They would do most of the planning, and his burden would be minimal. So that is what he did. The stateroom they had gotten was a balcony suite just above the main boardwalk, which had a cover extending directly

out from the bottom of the balconies of the ship all the way around. The balcony could easily be managed. One night, he crawled over the railing to stand on the roof of the boardwalk. He remembered he had walked to the edge and looked down. The lifeboats were below him, but with a medium to strong leap, they could easily be cleared. He stood there for a long time, looking at the black water rushing by as the cruise ship plowed forward. There it was—the end of burdens, the peace of oblivion. His wife would wake up to find him gone, he remembered thinking. It would be too late to mount a rescue as no one would know when he had leaped...but he had turned back...the burdens calling him.

Rubio broke his thoughts, focused on the now, and headed to the kitchen of his little two-bedroom house. Microwaving a cup of tea and adding a couple sugars, he headed back to the living room. Turning on the television, he began flipping through the channels, quickly skipping those full of sexually and sensually explicit images and rife with language that set his teeth on edge. He looked for something he could watch without causing angst to his conscience, something clean and wholesome, a task that was tough and getting tougher these days. He decided to pause on a popular religious channel. On the screen was a woman immaculately dressed from toe to neck. Her face, however, was heavily made up, almost clownish, with long false eyelashes and a hairdo that looked like a large wig sculpted to remain solidly in place even in her most passionate pleas.

“I’m here to tell you that God wants you to be happy. He is in heaven waiting to hear your prayer for the things you need. If you need that new house, he is ready to make it happen; a better job. He is standing by. Christians are supposed to be happy and

fulfilled in this life because they have chosen the right path by giving their heart to him. My friends, have faith. Your donation to the Soulful Broadcasting Cooperative will be worth it. God will bless you for it....isn't that right, Brother Trine?"

Across from her sat a diminutive but handsome individual. He, too, was dressed to the nines. American-made black and tan Allen Edmonds shoes on his feet, a black "power" suit with a light purple shirt and a deep purple tie, all the accouterments of someone who has wealth. His posture was confident and easy. Dark, loosely combed hair with a smattering of lighter highlights and a perfect face. Small straight nose, somewhat full lips, and an easy smile, someone who engendered trust the moment you saw them. His eyes were beautifully deep brown with gold highlights. However, there was an oddness in his gaze, as if he wasn't looking directly at his counterpart...just something off about the way he looked. In his hand, he caressed a crimson book with a gold emblem emblazoned on it. The emblem looked like the moniker for Toyota, with an extra vertical line running through the center. He was one of them.

"Yes, you are absolutely right, sister. God has granted us the ability to have whatever our heart desires if we just set our mind to do it his way. Be honest in dealings with others, have faith in him, and pray that he comes to your heart and you will be saved. Now, just call us. Our line is open, and the number is on the screen."

His ire was up. Grabbing his cell, he dialed the number on the screen. He watched as the phone on the table between the televised couple rang. He saw her push the speaker button.

"Hello, who is calling?"

“This is Rubio from Pasadena,” he said.

“Hello Rubio, how can we help you today?”

“Well, you can stop spreading false doctrine and giving people false hope.”

“I am sorry?”

“You teach people that God wants them to be wealthy and happy in this life. All they have to do is believe in him, and they will be saved. This is contrary to the scriptures. You have deliberately left out the message of obedience to his will. Faith requires obedience, including but not limited to baptism, Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16, and assembly in Hebrews 10:25.”

At that moment, Sister Padeiro’s co-host turned his face directly into the camera, his gaze seemingly piercing through the miles of streaming data to pierce directly into Rubio’s soul from the screen. A tight smile opened to reveal teeth that appeared to snarl through the atmosphere. In an almost jovial tone but with sinister underpinnings, he spoke.

“My dear Rubio, your legalistic view of the scriptures is not reflective of the true nature of God. I am afraid you have been duped into thinking that you have any part in your own salvation. God will save everyone that calls on him to do so.”

“Mister Trine,” refusing to call him “brother,” “scripture is very clear that we must obey and also believe. As for our actions, it is clear that God states in second Corinthians: ‘For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.’ And in Matthew 7:21: ‘Not

everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.’ My part in my salvation is obedience to his word and subjection of my will to *his*. You and many like you have watered down the message and turned churches into social clubs with cafes and the like to line your own pockets and supply your own greed. The truth is you have duped tens of thousands of souls into the easy and wide road that is leading them to destruction. Add to that your trickery with that false new book you’re holding, which you and your alien friends have brought with you, makes you doubly a false teacher.”

Brother Trine’s smile faded slightly, and his hand reached for the table as he said, “Rubio, thank you for your call.” Rubio heard the line go dead but continued to watch the screen as Brother Trine continued to speak.

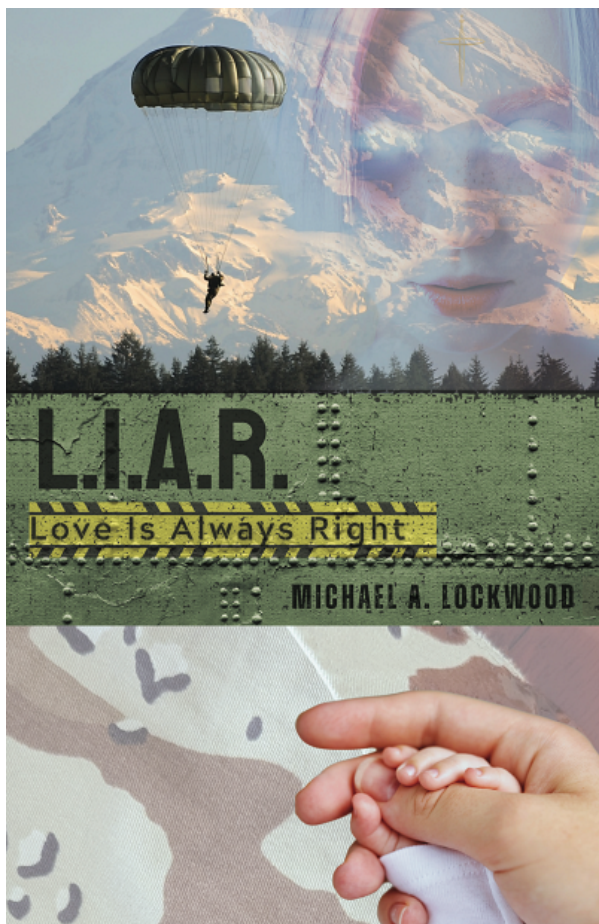
“Sister Padeiro, it is sure that folks like Rubio are misguided and confused. They are the ones we should not allow to influence our work of seeing that souls get the message of God’s desire for their happiness. Brother Rubio, I hope you are still listening, and eventually, I am sure you will hear and understand the truth of our message.” Sister P’s head bobbed up and down in agreement like some plastic toy as Brother Trine’s face glared at him from the TV, his smile becoming a little sharper, his eyes driving daggers into Rubio.

THAT WAS IT. He jumped up, grabbed the cable, and ripped it out of the wall. The falseness of the doctrine they were espousing made him shudder. How many souls would be lost because of this feel-good, watered-down, materialistic, and whitewashed baloney? Being faithful is hard in a society that has putrefied the word of God. Someone had to do something. But



what? Was his only recourse to continue to preach the word of God from the Bible? Then, a fixed thought came to his head. His wife would not like it, but she need not know. Yes. He had found purpose.

It was almost three now. Rubio picked himself up off the couch and meandered through the dark house to the back bedroom. The door was halfway open as always, giving a little light to the room from the hallway. He could see her silhouette under the covers. Sliding his jeans off and not bothering to remove his shirt, he gently lifted the covers and crawled into bed, scooching up tenderly to her where she lay on her back. Placing his hand on her bare bicep, hoping for some return indication of his offer of intimacy. Her slight snores continued in the night, and as a tear rolled down his cheek, he thought, as he drifted off to sleep, it's not that he didn't love her.



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