

COURT ON MOUNT HIGH



AMOS

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by
AMOS

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With love,

I dedicate this book to my wife, who inspired me forty-five years ago when she rescued three baby squirrels whose mother had been killed by a car. Her unceasing habit of rescuing God's creatures has continued throughout the years: turtles that need a lift across a busy road, wounded birds, helpless baby rabbits, abandoned kittens, and Sally, our dog, who was starved, abused, and tossed out on the side of the road. My wife has nursed them all back to health because she has compassionate hands for all of God's creatures.

"I could not have slept to-night if I had left that helpless little creature to perish on the ground." --
Abraham Lincoln

Chapter 1

"Watch it, David; those cars will run right over you! Don't you know that those are humans driving those metal contraptions?"

David raised his bald head and bitterly stated, "Yes, Grandfather, I know. You needn't even say the word. Humans...they don't care about a vulture's life or the life of any other creature."

Grandfather held his bald, wrinkled head high with dignity. "Someday the vultures of this world will gather together and bring the human race before the Court on Mount High. Their kind is truly not fit to be master of this planet." Grandfather's voice boomed as he continued his diatribe. "Their wars, their pollution, their foulness! But, most of all, will their abhorrent traffic ever come to an end! Humans destroy everything they come in contact with...our air, our water, our forests. They have no regard for any other creature, be it animal, bird, or bug. Not even a honeybee is safe when humans are near. They'll be the death of us all before they're done. Then who will clean up their messes?"

David smiled and silently chuckled. There goes Grandfather again, he thought, ranting and raving about the human race. However, he had something more important to worry about right now, and that was wooing Melissa, the beautiful vulture who lived four miles west of his clan. David had first seen her when he had gone with his grandfather to visit her tribe, and he immediately knew that she was "the one." Her dark brown feathers appeared almost ebony, and her beak was snowy white instead of the traditional ivory color. David had been watching Melissa for several months now and was determined that she would be his mate for life. And, he had a plan to do it.

David had been practicing his swoops for weeks. He was sure he would dazzle Melissa when he plummeted from high and then glided in to perch right next to her. Now, he just had to entice her to go flying by the beautiful falls on Little Sugar River. Saturday would be the day. Surely with his superior skills as a scavenger, he could find Melissa a meal that would convince her he would be an excellent provider, worthy to be her mate.

So, for the next few days, David intensified his efforts, rehearsing his grunts and barks to sound fierce. He found a secluded section of forest each day so that he could perfect his cooing, for the lower the tone, the more desirable the male is to the female. He also practiced spreading his wings to their full span, an incredible seventy-eight inches. This was a several-inch advantage over his nearest competitor and far surpassed the wingspan of the average vulture. David was well aware that his extraordinary wingspan, combined with his length of thirty-eight inches and his weight of almost six pounds, made him a heavyweight in the world of vultures. His nearest rival was just thirty-two inches long and weighed less than four pounds. David usually possessed an amiable and helpful demeanor, but these traits were temporarily quashed because he was feeling very competitive and intended to use every advantage he had to win Melissa. Surely, he thought, if he cooed in appropriately low tones, swooped daringly, and displayed his massive size, she would be swayed favorably.

Saturday arrived, but not all went as smoothly as David had planned. First, he had difficulty finding the tribe that Melissa traveled with. The clan's keen sense of smell had detected a deer about two miles distant, killed by one of those metal cars driven by humans, so the vultures had strayed from

their normal nesting area to claim the carcass. Melissa's family was just beginning to share in the feast when David arrived.

David knew he had to follow protocol, which meant he had to get the permission of Melissa's father before he could take her away from the tribe. Fortunately, her father and David's grandfather were old friends, so this enabled him to get approval quite easily, and the normal bantering was quickly over. Melissa's father cautioned David about only one thing. "Keep her safely away from humans," he warned.

When David swooped down next to Melissa, she spoke with a hint of annoyance, "I'm going with you only because my father wants me to." This totally took David by surprise, for he had been sure Melissa would be very attracted to him. Lena, Melissa's younger sister, giggled at David's startled expression. She knew that for months Melissa had desperately been hoping that David would ask her to go flying with him, and now that he had asked her, Melissa was just trying to make David more interested by acting as if she didn't care about him at all.

David and Melissa flew off with David leading the way. He wasn't concerned about taking Melissa from feeding with her family because he knew his skills at finding food were unsurpassed by any other vulture. What was on David's mind, though, was impressing Melissa because it was only fifteen miles to the waterfall. He had to act quickly.

David was in front, spreading his wings fully, hoping to awe Melissa, who, much to his surprise, was keeping pace with him. David was fascinated because, although he wasn't flying as fast as he could, he knew there were few other vultures who could keep pace with him as well as Melissa was. David performed a nose dive and then caught an air current to pull himself back up. This was not a traditional way for a vulture to fly but rather a technique he had mastered from his close study of eagles.

Melissa, a fast and highly coordinated flyer herself, was still amazed at David's flying skills. No one in her tribe had such ability. When she had first seen David, she had realized he was no ordinary vulture; now, she was totally convinced of this. The vultures she knew were too busy scavenging for food to take the time to learn to fly with such precision. As their journey continued, Melissa was awed by David even more, and a warm feeling of being carefree, yet safe, rushed through her.

When they reached the river, they followed its course eastward. David tipped his wing to the right to get Melissa's attention because he wanted her to see what was happening below on the banks of Little Sugar. Melissa looked down. Some male humans had a tanker truck backed up to the edge of the bank, and a large hose was discharging liquid into the river. The clear water was turning brown, and the surface was slick with a foamy green substance. Her mind raced to the anger her father would feel if he saw this, for he had taught her that the river was a place of serenity and contemplation, a place to get spiritually tuned in. Her father detested what humans did to the river, a wondrous gift from the Creator, which was being destroyed with pollution and trash.

In another minute David and Melissa arrived at the falls. David extended his wings as far as he could. His instincts told him that Melissa was not far behind, and he wanted her to be impressed by how enormous his wings were. He swooped across the river and began a steady ascent to the gnarled limb of an ancient sycamore tree that rose forty-five feet above the falls. David was firmly settled on

the branch and cooing when Melissa landed seconds later and moved closer to him. He was totally pleased that she had been able to keep up with him, for he was used to landing and waiting patiently while other vultures caught up. Even strong flyers from his own tribe, a tribe known for its fast flyers, couldn't match his pace, and Melissa had.

On this limb high above the falls on Little Sugar River, the romance began. David was determined to secure Melissa's devotion, but unknown to David, Melissa had already noticed his special qualities of humility, kindness, and leadership, traits that she admired and wanted in a mate. His flying skills and massive stature were welcome but not as important as these other attributes she saw in him. The two vultures perched quietly on the sycamore limb, enjoying the grand view of the waterfalls and the river below, completely content to be sitting next to each other.

Chapter 2

A few months had passed since Melissa and David's initial trip to the falls, and they were now happily mated for life. They had found shelter in a small cave on a hillside a few hundred yards from the nesting grounds of David's tribe. It was a perfect place to start a family.

After three months an egg was hatched and their son, David Jr., was born. For the next seventy days, the baby was fed the regurgitated food its parents had eaten. Both David and Melissa participated and both parents were devoted to their offspring. Nine weeks later David Jr. learned to fly, and it was not long before he was able to dive off the hillside. David was the one who taught his son to fly, and he enjoyed the experience immensely. No father was more proud of his offspring. Melissa contentedly watched her mate and her son cavort joyfully in the air.

Several more weeks elapsed, and David Jr. accompanied his parents on their outings to find food. Within a few weeks, David Jr. proudly took his position as a member of the clan, participating in a variety of vulture rituals. He clustered in the early morning to get food with his tribe, and when his flying skills had improved enough, he began to soar high in the sky on thermal air currents along with vultures from other tribes to form what humans referred to as kettles. He also participated in the community's most enjoyable rituals, sunbathing in trees with his wings spread and perching in dead trees, referred to as a wake by humans. Even at this young age, David Jr. had a keen sense of smell, an invaluable instinct of a turkey vulture, which black vultures did not have, and in the air, like his father, David Jr. also took on the attributes of an eagle when he flew. His well-pleased parents observed that their son was already receiving the admiration of both his peers and his elders.

As the months passed, David Jr. cemented the respect of all members of his clan because of his knack for finding food, his skill at flying, and his willingness to teach the younger birds. Like his father, David Jr. was destined to be a leader of the clan. One quality others admired but which caused his mother much trepidation was his fearlessness. When a carcass was spotted on the road, other vultures were content to wait hours till the human traffic subsided. Not David Jr. He never hesitated to dive onto the highway to pull food to the side of the road, and he sometimes challenged the huge metal vehicles by holding his ground, forcing them to slow down. On occasion, though, even David Jr. was forced to retreat at the last second if the offending vehicle did not decelerate or go around him.

Melissa cringed at her son's dare-devil antics both on the ground and in the air, for she was all too aware of how dangerous human beings could be, especially when driving. Her grandfather had been slaughtered by one of those gigantic tractor trailers. Even though he had been feeding on the side of the road, the human had swerved the huge truck and crushed him on purpose.

Unlike his mate, David never sensed any danger for his son. He was filled with pride for the skill his son displayed, and David often wondered just how good his son would get. The possibilities were enormous, for David Jr., just over a year old, already had a wingspan that exceeded that of any other vulture his age.

On a beautiful spring day in early May, Melissa and David decided to take a trip to the waterfalls. At first it was going to be just the two of them; however, David Jr. pleaded to accompany

them, and they finally relented and agreed that he could go too. Melissa thought that their son would have a hard time keeping pace with David and her, but this was not the case. David Jr. flew with precision and tireless energy all the way to the falls, and while his parents perched on the same sycamore tree limb of their first romantic encounter, David Jr. played gleefully by the falls. Again and again, he dove down to within a few feet of the rushing water and then caught a current of air that lifted him high into the sky.

After a couple of hours, Melissa entreated him to rest so that he would have enough energy for their return trip. David Jr. reluctantly stopped his play and perched on the limb beside his parents. While David Jr. napped, Melissa and David reminisced about their first visit to the falls. Since the sycamore held a special meaning in their relationship, Melissa suggested to David that they should name it, and he readily agreed. "This is where our life together began, so this sycamore above the waterfalls on Little Sugar River will forevermore be known as the Tree of Life," said Melissa happily.

The family enjoyed the beautiful scenery far into the afternoon till the time came for their journey home. They flew over the falls for one final view of the amazing landscape, and then David set the pace homeward, his family following close behind. They cruised between thirty-five to forty miles an hour, sometimes even reaching a speed of sixty miles an hour.

When the three were within half a mile of home, David's keen smell led him to a deer that had been hit by a passing car. The animal had collapsed several feet from the side of the highway pavement. The hungry family immediately began to devour the carcass. Melissa was enjoying the feast enormously. She knew they usually had to be cautious not to get hit by a human's car or truck, but this kill was unquestionably a safe distance from the pavement.

But, Melissa's joy was short-lived. When they were almost done with their meal, the unexpected happened—a pickup truck with large wheels abruptly left the highway and veered straight toward them. David and Melissa moved swiftly, fleeing for their lives, but David Jr. was on the other side of the deer with his back to the road. He did not see the danger and did not react quickly enough. The oversized wheel of the truck struck David Jr., instantly crushing him. The pickup skidded to a stop, and the passenger jumped out, laughed, and shouted to the driver, "Got that one!" The driver got out and handed the passenger an aluminum can; both men popped open the lids and lounged against the bed of the truck as they drank. When they were done, they tossed the empty cans onto the grass.

David and Melissa watched in agonized horror. One of the men pointed to them. He climbed back into the truck and returned with a rifle. Melissa and David were well aware of how dangerous humans with guns could be. They had no choice—they reluctantly lifted into the sky and flew away as swiftly as possible.

Chapter 3

A fortnight had passed since the tragic death of his son. David perched in the sycamore tree where he and Melissa had had their first date, the tree they had named the Tree of Life. He agonized over his son's death. Why had this happened? He understood that vultures lived dangerous lives, for he had seen many brethren suffer the same fate as David Jr. But, somehow this was different. David stared down at the river and forested valley for hours. The words of his grandfather circulated through his mind, and those words became his entire focus: "Someday the vultures of the world will gather together to take the human race before the Court on Mount High, for they are truly not worthy to be the masters of this planet...." The words reverberated in his head: "Someday the vultures of the world will gather together to take the human race before the Court on Mount High, for they are truly not worthy to be the masters of this planet...."

His eyes, as sharp as any eagle's, saw the rocky river below, flowing unimpeded through the valley. To view such a magnificent landscape...how could the Creator, who created such beauty have wanted his son deliberately killed by a barbarous human? Those humans were savages, not hunting for food nor killing out of necessity; their behavior was grossly insensitive and hostile to the proper restraints of nature. David Jr.'s death was a callous act, done only to satisfy that human's meanness. Similar acts of viciousness had killed his father and mother, whom he could not remember because he was so young when they had died, and his grandmother had been shot out of the sky, leaving only his grandfather to care for him.

His grandfather's words began to intensify in his mind: "Someday the vultures of the world will gather together to take the human race before the Court on Mount High, for they are truly not worthy to be masters of this planet...." As David meditated on those words, he did not consider flight or food, activities which had dominated his thinking in the past. A vivid image of Melissa mourning their son seized him and held him hostage to the fact that the death was so needless.

In the past, especially in his younger, carefree days when he had heard his grandfather's words, David had thought they were preposterous, or worse yet, maybe even blasphemous. He thought of the Creator's words in Genesis 2:26, "Let's make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Was he, David, going to defy the Creator by going against what He had said in the Holy Scriptures? Would that not be blasphemy?

David pondered the evil of man, and while doing so, he abruptly had a revelation. He remembered the words from Genesis 6:5-6, "Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually only evil. Yahweh was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart." David's mind was a whirlwind of thought. So many times the Scriptures stated that man had failed the Creator. From Psalms 26:5 he remembered the words, "I hate the assembly of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked," and from Matthew 10:21, "Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death." Proverbs 6:12-15 stated, "A

worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he who walks with a perverse mouth; who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who motions with his fingers; in whose heart is perverseness, who devises evil continually, who always sows discord. Therefore his calamity will come suddenly. He will be broken suddenly, and that without remedy.” David also recalled the verse from 2 Timothy 3:2-5, about man’s behavior, “For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, not lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God....” Scripture after scripture saying that man had betrayed the Creator rolled through David’s mind.

Then David was overwhelmed with another forceful epiphany. His grandfather was not suggesting that the vultures challenge the Creator. No, he was suggesting that the vultures ask the Creator for mercy, mercy from the evils of the human race. Would it not be honorable, even commendable, to implore the Creator to act against the extinction of the fauna and flora that the Creator had created? This had to be a good and worthy aspiration. The human race was out of control; they displayed nothing but greed, disrespect, and contempt for the earth and every other living creature. Humans even slew other humans. Their hearts were cold, their egos magnified beyond even the brilliance of the sun.

David pondered another saying from his grandfather that he had heard so many times: “Whom do humans hate worse than vultures?” The answer from a chorus of vultures would always be the same—other humans. David reasoned that surely the Creator, who is love, would have mercy on those humans who were being mistreated by other humans, as well as all the other creatures of the world who were being abused. Vultures could stand with complete assurance that they had done the work the Creator had set before them, keeping the earth clean. What possible justification could the human race claim for their own behavior? How could they justify their wars, the starvation of their own species, or the eradication of other species? What justification could they have for polluting the oceans, the rivers, the lakes? And, what about the land made barren by man’s improper use of toxic chemicals and the air so polluted it was dangerous to breathe? Did the Creator of everything not create the oceans, rivers, and lakes, the earth, and the air? Are trees and flowers not the Creator’s ornate adornments of Earth?

How could humans explain their destruction? Would they dare to confront the Creator with their endless cliché about the earth being theirs to use or destroy because they are the dominant species? Would not the Creator answer them with the same question he posed to Job (Job 38:4-5), “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding. Who determined its measures, if you know? Or who stretched the line on it?” Would humans challenge the Creator with their arrogance and display their inflated egos before the Court on Mount High? Certainly the humans would have to humble themselves before the Creator, wouldn’t they?

David’s current enlightenment about his grandfather’s wisdom made him feel an affinity with others who had also experienced remarkable revelations, such as the Apostle Paul and Buddha. Paul had gained a new comprehension of the profound teachings of Jesus when he was confronted by Him on the road to Damascus. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, had awakened with a new spiritual

knowledge after sitting in a meditative state under a Bodhi tree until all ignorance had been eradicated from his mind.

David knew he had been transformed. He was no longer a vulture just concerned with survival. He was now a vulture with a mission, committed to bringing the human race before the Court on Mount High. David's heart pounded faster within his chest, and he knew his destiny awaited him. First, he would inspire his own tribe with his vision and then move from one community to the next. He would reach out to every vulture on earth and would not rest until all vultures were united. Then, they would appeal to all living creatures of the earth, who—in solidarity—would bring the human race before the Court on Mount High.

David's rage over his son's death had been supplanted by a new boldness, a determination to change the world. David, perched high in the sycamore, remembered the story of the David who had slain the giant Goliath. That young David had sent the mighty Philistine army into flight. David's wings spread widely as he gazed down at the valley. He held his head high and thought about the strength and determination of that young biblical David. Was he not a David, too? Had he been named David in vain? Or was his name a prophecy? Was he bold enough, strong enough to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High?

He barked softly and then more loudly and more loudly until his voice echoed in the valley below, and with every breath in his being, he exclaimed, "I am David!" His boldness grew till he could clearly envision himself uniting all the vultures of the earth to bring the humans before the Court on Mount High. "There will be justice on Earth," he repeated again and again. Another screech, mightier than the first, burst from David's lungs, "I am David!" Then again and again David shouted. The forest grew silent—the deer didn't run, the rabbits didn't hop, the birds didn't sing, and even the crickets and frogs held their silence because every living creature within earshot of David's voice knew the world had just changed. David's keen eyes gazed down over the waterfalls into the valley, and wondrously he saw seven rainbows emanate from the river. This was his sign from the Creator. David's heart beat more slowly now, and he was at peace with his decision.

Roosting high in the tree above the rainbow-clad river, David formulated a plan. He knew that vultures love to gather at camp meetings to enjoy one another's company. First, he would ask the leaders of his tribe for permission to hold a camp meeting and then get the support of the leaders of the nearby vulture communities. Next, he would travel far and wide to spread word of his mission and to persuade every vulture he met to attend the meeting. While everyone was enjoying themselves at the camp meeting, he would make a speech which would emphatically explain the need to take the human race before the Court on Mount High, a speech which would inspire them to give their assistance and their support to the mission, a mission which would change the world.

Chapter 4

David returned to his clan the next day, and Melissa immediately sensed the change in her mate. "I can feel your spirit's exuberance," she said. "You are no longer forlorn and comfortless. Tell me what has happened. I am hoping your words will lift the cloud of darkness that has overwhelmed me as well since the death of our son."

David told Melissa about his revelation. At first she was not eager to accept his new-found spiritualism and might have rejected the whole notion as the fantasy of a grieving father until David mentioned the Tree of Life, the same tree he had taken her to on their first date, the same tree they had joyfully returned to time and time again. Melissa remembered how soothing the sycamore had felt to her. As she reflected on all that her mate had said, her thoughts returned to the tree; it truly was a spiritual place.

An entire day passed before Melissa said anything to David about his revelations, but when she finally spoke, her words were supportive. "You know, David, no creature on Earth has ever dared to petition the Court on Mount High for justice against the human race. But, if humans are going to be challenged, we vultures should be the ones to do so. We have been cleaning up after the human race for thousands upon thousands of years. In my eyes, David, there is no vulture greater than you, and if anyone can accomplish this task, it is you. My hope is that you have chosen a mate that is worthy of such a mission."

David nuzzled Melissa. "Your understanding and support will give me the strength I need, and together we will accomplish this mission. And, yesterday I spoke to Grandfather, and his words were also favorable and encouraging."

As David went about his routine for the next few days, he contemplated what he would say at the camp meeting. He was sure he could excite them because getting vultures aroused when speaking about the evils of humans was never hard to do. However, the more he considered the matter, the more convinced he became that he needed to do more than just rant and rave against mankind. Finally, after a week he decided to return to the sycamore tree by the waterfalls high above Little Sugar River. He needed solitude to meditate; he needed spiritual guidance.

David bid Melissa and his clan goodbye. He joyfully anticipated his return to the ancient sycamore high above the waterfalls, the one that Melissa had named the Tree of Life so many months ago. The flight to the waterfalls eased his mind, and soaring above the valley made him feel powerful, relaxed, and in control. As he landed on the tree limb, his mind immediately pictured his mate, and he reminisced about the wonderful times they had spent there. He embraced the silence around him and all distractions drained from his conscious mind. He found serenity in the stillness.

As the hours passed, David came to a new understanding: how he spoke was just as crucial as what he spoke. His demeanor must be humble yet assertive, decisive, and compelling; he must be a bulwark of strength. David was smitten with a new enlightenment about the words in Luke 17:3, "Be careful. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him." After his son's death, all he had wanted was revenge against the humans and felt that the only solution was the total

destruction of the human race. Now, in the comfort of the waterfalls and woods around him, David had another manifestation. The human race needed to do what Jesus demanded in Mark 1:15, "...The time is fulfilled, and God's Kingdom is at hand! Repent, and believe in the Good News." Humans needed their psyche reawakened and restored to a caring and nurturing state so that they would truly act in the image of their Creator.

As David's meditation grew deeper, the words from Acts 4:33-35 spoke to him, "Great grace was on them all. For neither was there among them any who lacked, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to each, according as anyone had need." Then, two words erupted from David's subconscious and reverberated through his being, and he whispered, "Great Grace...Great Grace...Great Grace. That is what man needs. Yes, Great Grace...that is what the human race needs." If the entire human race was under great grace, the earth and its creatures could be saved. David smiled and fell into a contented sleep.

When David awoke, the sun was rising, and perched a few feet away on the same limb was a bald eagle. David was so startled he instinctively went into self-defense mode by stretching his wings as far as they would go to scare the intruder with his size. In just seconds, though, David's intuitive senses told him that the eagle meant no harm, and he relaxed once again.

David said, "Welcome to the Tree of Life. How long have you been here?"

The eagle replied, "I was awakened in the night by a dream. In this dream I was told to come here above the waterfalls to this limb on this sycamore that has been named the Tree of Life. I was told that I would find a vulture named David, who would have a message for me. Are you David, the one I seek?"

"Yes, I am David."

"I am Justice, an American bald eagle. Tell me the message you have for me." Justice stretched her wings and then refolded them to get more comfortable. David noticed that the feathers on her breast and under her wings and tail were almost totally white, a very striking sight.

David recited, in detail, the tragedy of his son's death and how he had been inspired to take the human race before the Court on Mount High. David ended his tale with the plea, "If we do not do this, every vulture will surely disappear from the earth."

Justice listened carefully, nodding her head in agreement. When she spoke, her words were forceful and tinged with controlled anger. "My own species came close to extinction. Humans sought our feathers and boasted of their might when they made us fall from the sky. We bald eagles were almost eradicated, but then a few good humans came to our rescue and stopped the others from hunting us."

"Yes," agreed David, "there are good humans but too few of them."

"Even so," warned Justice, "it is best to be watchful when one is around humans. You never know what humans will do."

David nodded in agreement.

Justice continued, "I am somewhat surprised that a vulture would be concerned about the malignant behavior of the human race. You know, David, among the creatures of the earth, there is a

humorous saying that the only thing the human race is good for is the vulture. If even the vultures have turned against the humans, then surely there is no creature left that will defend them.”

David spoke with conviction, “I am sure that I can unite the vultures of the world to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High. I perceive clearly now what I could only imagine before, and I have traveled through emotional realms that I did not even know existed. Since my son’s death, I have fought despair, been overwhelmed with rage, and found the seeds of hope; now I am on the path of faith. I say with genuine humility that I am a new David, so transformed I dare not look back at the old David. On this new path I know that the humans will be forced to their knees before the Court on Mount High.”

“You seem as determined and honest as my dream said you would be,” complimented Justice. “I am a lawyer with impeccable credentials. I have been called here by our Creator to plead your case before the Court on Mount High, for I was born to preserve justice. I would be honored to prepare the case of Vultures versus Human Race.”

David cooed with happiness. “Thank you. I believe you have been sent to confirm my faith.”

“David, it is up to you to go forth and gather not only the vultures but all the creatures of the earth to support your cause. All species must be united for us to go forward with this mission. Once you have cemented the support of all the vultures, go to the whales and dolphins. They travel throughout the oceans of the world and can spread your message rapidly, and their voices console all creatures. You must unite all birds, reptiles, mammals, and amphibians, all fish and insects. Let the trees, the bushes, the flowers, all vegetation know that your cause will be their salvation. Let everything that lives on Earth stand united in your mission to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High to make them accountable for their atrocities.”

David nodded in agreement, and Justice continued, “I shall return to this tree, the Tree of Life, one year from today. As soon as all the creatures of the earth are united, I will immediately petition the Court on Mount High to accept your case. Complete the organizing as quickly as you can so that I can submit the petition before we meet again. Go and be triumphant, my friend.”

“Thank you, Justice. On May 30th, one year from today, I shall be here. But, I have one question for you before we part. Is not your species the symbol of the nation of humans called the United States?”

“Alas, yes, the people of this land are impressed with my species’ independence and great courage. Humans began using the symbol when one of my ancestors was awakened by the sound of gunfire centuries ago, what humans refer to as the Revolutionary War. My ancestor flew over a battlefield shrieking, ‘Peace, peace,’ but, of course, the humans, intent on fighting each other, mistook the shrieks as a battle cry, urging them to fight instead of to cease fighting. My ancestor, whose name was Majestic, was simply trying to protect her children, who were in their nest at the corner of the field. They are humans...what else can I say? Till we meet again, David, I wish you Godspeed.”

“Godspeed to you too, Justice, my friend.”

Justice leaped from the limb and after plummeting twenty feet, opened her wings wide and soared high into the sky. She swept over the river and within a minute disappeared from sight. David

sat on the limb quietly, feeling a sense of happiness and determination radiating from every fiber of his being.

Chapter 5

After David's meeting with Justice, he went to find food. When he returned to the Tree of Life, he perched on the same limb and thought about the speech he needed to make at the camp meeting. He was convinced beyond a doubt that Justice could represent the creatures of the earth with power and confidence. Now, it was up to him to unite his fellow vultures and all creatures. Would everyone think he was a fool and laugh at him or, even worse, just dismiss him as he had his own grandfather? After all, no one else had ever been brazen enough to attempt to take the human race before the Court on Mount High. Part of him was fearful that the humans would be so enraged at being challenged that they would start a killing spree. Every creature knew it was ludicrous to infuriate humans. As David considered all that was before him, he thought of the Scripture in Hebrews 13:5, "Be free from the love of money, content with such things as you have, for he has said, 'I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you.'" David repeated that Scripture over and over while watching the sun set, the sky a glorious medley of pink, purple, orange, and blue. Finally, his eyes grew heavy and he slept.

Three peaceful hours passed, and then David was startled awake by a hooting. Sitting on the limb a few feet away was a large chestnut-colored owl, whose huge tawny eyes stared at David. "Is this the tree known as the Tree of Life?" the owl asked in a baritone.

David responded, "It is, indeed."

"I am Solomon. Other owls refer to me as the wisest of all owls. If you are David, I have been sent by the eagle Justice to assist you in preparing a speech."

"I am David, and I am on a mission to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High. They must be held accountable."

"Ah," replied Solomon, "we are facing a monumental challenge."

David sighed, nodding his head in agreement. He proceeded to relate his story to Solomon and explained how he had been transformed after his son's death. When David was done, Solomon did not question him as he had expected. Instead, Solomon announced, "I know the attorney Justice and have had the pleasure of assisting her in many cases in the past. She is erudite and held in high esteem by all. There is no better legal mind in the land. You are gifted, indeed, to have such an attorney to present your case in the courtroom. David, I am happy to share my wisdom and to assist those who carry out the Creator's will, so how may I help you?"

David felt as if a huge burden had been lifted from him. Surely this was another sign that he should totally embrace his mission. David told Solomon about the camp meeting he was organizing and asked Solomon to help him prepare a speech that would inspire his audience to action. Solomon readily agreed. He bowed his head, and his voice was solemn. "Let me begin by making you aware of the critical state of your own species, as well as the knowledge I have of other species on Earth, so that you will be wiser in your mission."

David nodded and for the next several hours listened intently as Solomon related valuable information that David could incorporate into his speech.

"There are twenty-three species of vultures that are in danger of becoming extinct," Solomon stated. "The species living in the nations of India and Pakistan are in extreme danger. The Oriental white-back vulture has declined by ninety-nine percent. There were once hundreds of thousands of these birds; now fewer than one thousand live. The long-billed vulture has suffered a similar fate, and the number of slender-billed vultures has been reduced by ninety-seven percent. The eradication of these birds was caused by humans giving a drug called diclofenac to their work cattle. This drug allowed their cattle, bullocks, and water buffaloes to continue working even when they were lame from doing too much labor. When these drugged animals died, the vultures ate them, and since the vultures did not have the body mass of the dead cattle, the diclofenac killed them within a few days. Because the vultures could not do their work, cattle carcasses lay rotting in the fields, and then infectious diseases from these carcasses spread to other animals and humans. The sharp decline in vultures has also led to a dramatic increase in the rat population, and rats, of course, carry diseases rapidly from one place to another."

Solomon explained that vultures lived on every continent except Antarctica and Australia, and because of the number of species of vultures around the world, a network could be set up to enable the vultures to unite other animal species in their geographical areas.

Next, Solomon told David about the special language of clicking sounds that whales and dolphins use to communicate and that humpback and blue whales use low frequency sounds called whale songs. David listened carefully because he remembered that Justice had also spoken about the whales and dolphins.

David concentrated for hours as Solomon spoke about hundreds of animals that inhabit the earth. He was enthralled by the knowledge and filled with a new respect for his fellow creatures. He learned the tiny ruby-throated hummingbird, which he had total disregard for before, can fly over the ocean for five hundred miles on its migratory journey. The polar bear can survive in temperatures of fifty degrees below zero because it has two coats of fur and its skin is actually black, allowing it to absorb more sunlight. The vulture's rival, the bald eagle, can reach speeds of one hundred miles per hour and climb ten thousand feet into the sky. David was amazed that the mighty lion's roar can be heard for a distance of five miles and that every tiger has an exclusive set of stripes, making each tiger different. Similarly, the ridged pattern on a cat's nose is also unique, like a human fingerprint, so that no two are the same. David chuckled with amazement when he learned that an ant can lift fifty times its weight and pull an object thirty times its weight and that a salmon can swim as far as nine hundred miles inland to reach its ancestral home. David had a new respect for the cumbersome elephant when he learned that it can hear another elephant two to three miles away by using the combined vibrations it feels through its ears and its feet. David felt especially satisfied in the knowledge that frogs have survived on earth for over 190,000,000 million years whereas humans have only been on earth for 200,000 years.

When the darkness of night began to fade into the smoky slate of dawn, Solomon said, "I must leave now, but I shall return at the next sunset so that we can continue our task. Get some rest, my friend."

David spent the morning roosting on the limb. He was in awe of his new experiences and his new acquaintances. In early afternoon David flew over the waterfalls and glided down the river where he found food. As he flew, he thought of Melissa. He was excited to tell her about everything that had happened at the Tree of Life. With thoughts of his mate still on his mind, David returned to the sycamore limb; he watched the sparkling water and felt total contentment. In mid-afternoon David fell asleep and did not awaken again until he heard Solomon gently hooting beside him.

For the next two nights Solomon imparted knowledge that David could use in his speech at the camp meeting. He learned that there are over 1,740,000 species that inhabit Earth, over five thousand species of mammals, ten thousand species of birds, nine hundred species of reptiles, more than sixty thousand species of fish, six thousand species of amphibians, one million species of insects, forty thousand species of spiders, and fifteen hundred species of scorpions. David learned there are three hundred thousand species of plants and twenty-five thousand species of trees. Solomon tutored David for hours about the fascinating species of fauna and flora inhabiting Earth.

David's rapture was dashed, though, when Solomon spoke about the more than three thousand species of animals and the more than twenty-six hundred species of plants that were rapidly becoming endangered because of humans. "Each year humans continue to encroach on natural animal habitats, and the pollution caused by humans is causing the climate to change," schooled Solomon. "Thousands of species are destined to become extinct if mankind does not change its habits, animals such as the mountain gorilla, the fin whale, the snow leopard, the brown bear, the rhino, and the tree kangaroo. The list goes on and on."

Solomon also educated David about human pollution. "Through burning coal, humans emit over thirty-eight billion tons of carbon dioxide into the air each year. This is a primary cause of global warming." Solomon sighed sadly, "Humans have the technology to fix the problem, but they refuse to acknowledge how critical the problem is. But, air pollution is not the only issue. Water pollution is a horrendous problem also. Oceans, lakes, rivers, streams, and even ground water have all reached septic levels of contamination from man's sewage, toxic metals, chemical waste, radioactive materials, oil, and plastics. You name it and humans dump it."

Hours passed as Solomon continued to recite the history of man's abuse of the world's environment. "The land is not sacred either," sighed Solomon. "Arsenic, mercury, oil, pesticides, lead, heavy metals, pharmaceutical waste, PCB, fly ash, and radioactive materials are just some of the toxic substances that the human race manages quite badly." Then Solomon revealed an appalling fact to David. "Over sixty million humans die each year from these pollutants, and do you know what their solution is? They create more pollution at an even faster rate."

When Solomon's recitation was complete, he said, "Now you have the necessary facts. Tomorrow when we meet at dusk, we will work on your speech."

The next evening David and Solomon conferred steadily, composing and revising, and after many hours the speech was complete. They had created an articulate work of oratory with a sound argument as to why the human race should be taken before the Court on Mount High.

David was ecstatic about the speech but still anxious. He asked Solomon, "This is a great speech but how can one speech unite all vultures? And, how about the other species? Are they going to accept vultures bringing the human race before the Court on Mount High? "

Solomon answered David with wisdom. "Each creature on the earth understands every other creature and how they all fit into the web of life. Only the human race has difficulty grasping the concept that the Creator created a natural order, called nature. Nature is the force that controls the universe. When the humans violate and infringe upon the laws of nature, they breach their covenant with the Creator. The Creator gave to humans so bountifully, so their breach is shocking and disillusioning, and this breach has caused great confusion, intolerable distress, unnecessary sickness, insufferable pain, and unconscionable death to the other species of this planet.

"You must have faith, David," soothed Solomon. "Remember 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, 'But God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong. God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that don't exist, that he might bring to nothing the things that exist, that no flesh should boast before God.' The humans see us as foolish, and they see us as lowly. That's why our Creator has chosen us for this task."

Solomon stared at David with his piercing eyes. "Remember the words in 2 Corinthians 6:2, '...At an acceptable time I listened to you. In a day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.'" Solomon continued, "Remember, the Creator transcends time. The Creator enters time at will making what was not possible yesterday possible today. In 2 Peter 3:8, we are reminded, 'But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'"

David listened to Solomon with immense respect. Then he asked, "I agreed to meet here with Justice one year from now, the thirtieth of May, to report my progress. Solomon, will you meet with us? Your wisdom will be much needed and much appreciated."

"Yes," Solomon promised, "I shall look forward to meeting with you again. Let me leave you, my dear friend, with these words from Galatians 5:5, 'For we, through the Spirit, by faith wait for the hope of righteousness.'" Then Solomon spread his broad wings and in complete silence flew away. David had always wondered how owls flew so noiselessly, but as Solomon lifted from the limb, David saw the velvety down feathers and the tattered fringe feathers, and he understood immediately that that was the secret to soundless flight. David decided to rest for a while before he sought food; he was trying to comprehend all that he had learned, and despite his hunger, he soon drifted off to sleep and slept until late in the morning.

Chapter 6

When David finally awoke the next morning, nourishment was his first priority, so he flew over the valley looking for food. An hour later he returned to the Tree of Life, his hunger satisfied. He began to silently practice his speech, which Solomon had helped him to organize in a logical sequence. He repeated the delivery over and over till every word was clearly embedded in his mind. He knew the oration would appeal to his listeners' sense of righteousness and justice rather than just exude contempt for the human race. As David repeated the words, he realized their artful simplicity made the speech a masterpiece. He rehearsed and rehearsed and soon the day had lapsed into night. The moon and a brilliant array of stars adorned the sky. David rested, and his last thought before he was fully asleep was that the Creator had blessed him despite his recent tragedy.

The following morning David returned to his tribe. They were all glad to see him, especially Melissa. As they sat side by side, David revealed everything that had happened while he was gone. He told Melissa about Justice and Solomon and about the speech.

With Melissa's steadfast approval, David approached the leaders of the clan. He asked them for permission to arrange a camp meeting and to invite representatives from other tribes and communities to attend so that he could address all of them at one time about his mission. Unknown to David, his grandfather, a respected elder, had already been urging the leaders of the tribe to support David's undertaking, so he received their unanimous approval. David's heart was still heavy from the loss of his son, but his mind was now free to concentrate on his purpose—to make the human race accountable before the Court on Mount High.

After receiving the approval for the camp meeting, David and Melissa flew to see his grandfather to thank him for exerting his influence with the other tribal leaders. David's grandfather had nothing but praise for him. "You should be proud of all that you have accomplished," Grandfather said. "I have been in deep prayer about your mission and I have had a prognostication. Before I speak of it to you, though, remember these words from Amos 3:7-8, 'Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord Yahweh has spoken. Who can but prophesy?'"

Melissa and David listened carefully as Grandfather continued, "I am sure our Creator has spoken to me and has revealed that the camp meeting you have planned should be held at Cedar Hills Tree Farm. There are evil humans who, if they become aware of the camp meeting, might try to turn it into a massacre. Cedar Hills is the only safe place. I have lived many years and I can testify that even bees and bugs are safe there. The tree lady and her mate who live there show love and kindness to all creatures. Our tribal leadership...I am a member and you and Melissa will be members one day...guards a secret. The secret is that numerous humans, many more than one might expect, are kind and good to other creatures on Earth, but we teach our young to beware of all humans because of the difficulty of distinguishing the good humans from the bad ones. This is truly a matter of life or death. But, the people at Cedar Hills Tree Farm are at peace with all other creatures. The tree lady has rescued many birds wounded by natural calamities or human automobiles and has driven many miles

to deliver them to a sanctuary that heals their wounds. She is known in the animal kingdom as the Lady of Cedar Hills Who Loves All God's Creatures.

"Yes," repeated Grandfather, "Cedar Hills will be an excellent location. Did you know that Native Americans, who respected and intentionally harmonized with nature, used cedar in their spiritual ceremonies? Cedar has a direct connection to prayer and healing.

"But, I am digressing. As I was saying, there is a pond at Cedar Hills Tree Farm, which will supply drinking water, and the thousands of trees will provide shelter for the many visitors. The weeping willow trees by the pond will be a symbol of how we weep for the earth and all creatures which are being destroyed by the human race. There is a gazebo by the pond. You can speak from its roof so that everyone can see you and hear you. I visited the farm just a few days ago as I often do when I want to find solitude. I met a large extended family of flying squirrels, and they have agreed to serve as sentinels. They will alert you if any malicious humans are in the vicinity. The camp meeting should be held on October 2, David, the birthday of a great human leader, Mahatma Gandhi."

David looked truly puzzled that Grandfather would say such words, so Grandfather patiently explained. "Gandhi once said, 'The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated.'" Instantly David understood, nodded in agreement, and hugged his grandfather in gratitude. He had not previously considered Cedar Hills as a location for the camp meeting, but the wise words of his grandfather showed him that it would, indeed, be an excellent venue.

With details about the camp meeting finalized, Grandfather warned, "I am gravely concerned about the safety of you and Melissa. I have seen too much death--Grandmother shot out of the air while flying next to me, your mother and father mangled by a tractor trailer, and David Jr. innocently murdered before he even had a chance to fully live. These deaths have wrenched my very being. If I did not know there was a Creator, I would have succumbed to complete anguish and perished. Vultures live dangerous lives but no one should be subjected to the pain I have suffered. Why does the human race hate Jesus so? Why do they love to hate and hate to love?"

Melissa comforted Grandfather. "Don't worry. We will be careful; we'll be safe."

David bowed his head so Grandfather would not see his eyes, for he was keenly aware of the reality of his grandfather's concern. Even for vultures as strong and wise as Melissa and he, the world was an exceedingly dangerous place. The evidence was clear by the fact that his grandmother, his father, and his mother had never lived long enough for him to remember them. But, most of all, he knew from the agony that lacerated his own heart, the death of his son, David Jr. After a few moments of silence, Melissa, David, and Grandfather spent the rest of the afternoon in more pleasurable conversation.

Chapter 7

For the next several weeks, David visited other tribes outside his own community, telling them about his mission and inviting them to attend the camp meeting. He left for three or four days at a time and then returned so that he could spend time with Melissa. On one of these sojourns after flying fifty-eight miles along the Broad River, he stopped by a heavily wooded area, where he encountered a community of twenty-eight vultures. They were all hungry because they had not found enough sustenance in the last few days. David used his superior flying skills and sense of smell to find food for the tribe, and after everyone had eaten, he told them about the upcoming camp meeting and his intention to take the human race before the Court on Mount High. Even though David had impressed the clan by finding them nourishment, he still met resistance from a few of the conservative leaders who were entrenched in the notion that nothing can change. One cynical vulture summed up his skepticism, "The world is what the world is. Humans will kill us all...that's how it is."

But, then, David spoke. He gave an abbreviated account of the misconduct of the human race, their superior attitude, their malice toward other creatures, and their negligent and irresponsible behavior against the earth's environment. David's delivery was so passionate and convincing that he soon won over even the conservatives, and everyone in the tribe agreed that they would appoint representatives to attend the camp meeting. David was thrilled by the supporters he had just gained, and his successful oratory skills buoyed his confidence.

Just as David was about to depart, he was approached by a broad-chested vulture. "That was an energizing speech," he told David. "My name is Studs and I'm glad to meet you. I hope you don't mind, but I have a suggestion. I believe your task would be much easier if you enlisted official organizers in each territory. They could take on the responsibility of getting the message out and organizing the area's tribes so that everyone works together. I, for one, support you whole-heartedly and would be honored to be one of your appointed organizers. I also know several other very capable and influential vultures, who can unite not only their own clans but also other nearby clans to support your mission and send representatives to the camp meeting."

David immediately saw the potential in getting official organizers to help him. It was the necessary ingredient he needed to speed up the process and maximize his efforts. He gladly accepted Studs' help and, henceforth, everywhere he would go he would look for those vultures who had special organizing skills.

A week later, David followed a hunch and went to Asheville, North Carolina. Along the bank of the French Broad River, where he stopped for water and food, he met an older, genteel vulture that was traveling alone. The vulture introduced himself and each word was articulately pronounced in a rich, throaty bass. "I am Saul. I have seen a great many years pass and I have seen many things. A few weeks ago, I passed down the leadership of my tribe to my son. I am proud to say that I organized all of the vulture clans within two days' flight north of my home into a great council. If there are problems or disagreements between tribes, they are brought before this council."

David was enthused to hear Saul, for he was exactly the type of person he was looking for to help organize. David told Saul about his mission and without hesitation Saul agreed. "Indeed, for centuries humans have wreaked havoc upon the environment and its creatures. I pledge my full support and will help you organize to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High."

David and Saul had a long dialogue about organizing techniques and agreed that appealing to a group's common needs was essential. All creatures needed nourishment, companionship, relaxation, spirituality, justice, and freedom from fear of humans.

David soon realized that Saul was an organizational genius, so he listened intently to everything that Saul had to say. At the end of the second day, though, David longed to reunite with Melissa and knew she would be worried about him. As David was about to depart, Saul promised, "I am committed your cause. I shall go before our great council and get the support of each member clan, and we will send representatives to the camp meeting. Then, I shall crisscross the nation and spread word of your mission and the camp meeting." Saul peered into David's eyes. "Do not fear, David, for fear is of the devil. Your cause is just and victory is near. To the Court on Mount High you shall go."

When David returned home, he spent time alone with Melissa. Again, he kept her informed of all that had transpired. After a few days David was ready to fly in a southwesterly direction, hoping to find more organizers. David and Melissa had missed each other so much while he was away during the past few months that Melissa decided to fly with him. They encountered several small tribes along the way, and each time they were able to convince the clan elders to send representatives to attend the camp meeting in the fall.

When Melissa and David were about two hundred miles from home, they found a large tribe of vultures that numbered over a hundred. The members, a tight-knit community, welcomed the couple, especially when they found out about David's mission, for the clan had been plagued by humans trying to murder some of their members just for amusement.

They soon befriended Ida Bell, a short but stately vulture, whose fiery words condemned the ruination caused by the human race. Both David and Melissa were exceedingly impressed, so when she asked them to accompany her to visit a near-by tribe, they readily agreed.

It took an hour to reach their destination, but when they arrived, David and Melissa were treated like royalty. Ida Bell introduced them to another remarkable vulture, Harriett. Although she was rather small, she was extremely strong-willed and had no hesitation telling David and Melissa that they were on a mission from heaven. "When a creature has been called by his Creator to perform a mission," Harriet said, "he must rise to the challenge and leave behind the comforts of home to follow a path seldom taken. He must gather the inner strength and rely on his love for and commitment to his fellow creatures to drive out the darkness in the world." She readily volunteered to help.

They also met a robust vulture named George, whose hardy body was bouncing with enthusiasm to assist the ladies. An agreement was readily reached; Ida and Harriet would organize the neighboring areas, and George would provide them with sufficient food as they travelled. David and Melissa had no doubt about their capabilities. After the preparations were made, they began the return journey to their own clan where they would rest for a few days before leaving for the North.

When they arrived home, two fortuitous events happened that made David feel as if an overwhelming weight had been lifted from his soul. First, Melissa's twin brother, Nolan, along with his two trusted friends, Dustin and Jackson, volunteered to fly far west to organize vulture clans; then, as they were speaking, Melissa's younger sister, Lena, came to visit with two of her friends, Ellie and Chloe. The three volunteered to meet with anyone who visited their tribe to ask about the camp meeting while David and Melissa were gone. They were elated and readily imparted all the information Nolan and Lena would need about the meeting and the weeping willow trees at Cedar Hills Tree Farm. David trusted these events were good omens.

Chapter 8

Two days later Melissa and David headed north. Their trip progressed slowly because not only was there a strong wind blowing against them but the organizing was also going slowly. They found several small tribes; most were interested but unwilling to make a commitment to go to the camp meeting because their fear of humans was so strong it impeded them from taking any action. They also found few who were willing to organize.

As they flew, both were dismayed at the seemingly endless human expansion. Everywhere they looked, there were houses upon houses upon houses, commercial buildings and malls, endless intertwining highways, and cultivated fields. And, those mechanical vehicles raced down the asphalt everywhere, their exhaust polluting the air and their drivers oblivious to the suffering environment around them. Melissa sighed with discontent every time she saw the discolored waterways, ash dump sites, and areas crammed with human litter.

One day toward afternoon, they stopped by the outskirts of a vast city. Again, they were dismayed by the endless, deafening traffic, the discarded debris, and the unsightly litter—wrappers, Styrofoam, cardboard, tinfoil, plastic—scattered everywhere. They wondered how any creature could survive under such conditions. They scavenged some food, and while they were eating, two vultures appeared, one aged and hobbled, the other much younger and rather muscular. “Good day to you,” spoke the older one. “My name is Robert and this is my nephew, Ezer. Welcome to our region.”

David quickly seized the opportunity, introduced himself and Melissa, and launched into his speech about the mission. When David stopped, Robert smiled. “Glad to make your acquaintance. Some humans got me with some rocks a few years back. Smashed my leg up pretty bad, but I got away. That maddened them more than anything. It’s about time somebody stood up to humans.”

Then Ezer spoke up and readily agreed to help. “Your mission is, indeed, a worthy one. I will speak to our tribe, and we will speak to other clans in the region, for no matter how big or how small, all creatures need relief from the reckless and destructive actions of mankind. We will most certainly send representatives to the camp meeting. I might suggest that if you want to avoid humans, you should fly northeast toward the mountains. There you will see an old trail that winds for more than two thousand miles through the mountains and countryside. Follow it and you will be at ease.” David and Melissa thanked Ezer and headed north.

With no further tribulations, Melissa and David made it to the forested area, known by humans as the Appalachian Trail. They were surprised by the multitude of animal species along the path. The woods abounded with raccoons, mice, deer, skunks, porcupines, rabbits, snakes, and even domestic dogs and cats that had been abandoned. There was also an array of birds that included bald eagles, blue birds, loons, woodpeckers, towhees, scarlet tanagers, and quail. What interested David the most, however, were the magnificent bears, some as huge as three hundred fifty pounds. Melissa enjoyed watching the cubs play and experienced a nostalgic sadness for the loss of her own child. They spent the night roosting in a large maple tree a few yards from the trail.

They soon realized the Appalachian Trail was the perfect route and would take them through several states. In each one David and Melissa hoped to meet other vultures who would agree to organize and select representatives from each tribe to attend the upcoming camp meeting. David and Melissa always delivered the same message: "Come to the camp meeting at Cedar Hills Tree Farm under the weeping willow trees by the pond. There, we shall weep over mankind's destruction of our fellow creatures and the earth's environment. We vultures must be the driving force, the ones to organize and gain the support of all the other creatures of the world, the ones to take the human race before the Court on Mount High. Let us unite, for if we do not, thousands of us will surely die and hundreds of species will become extinct. Our Creator gave us the gift of survival...let us utilize this gift to bring hope to our young." At every stop Melissa and David were now finding entire tribes of vultures who readily accepted their message, and they appointed several new official organizers.

Most of the time David and Melissa met other vultures like themselves who were willing to help because of personal losses and their shared concern about the devastation the human race was causing. Sometimes the vultures they encountered were colorful characters like James from New Jersey. When they met, he authoritatively stated, "My name is James but they call me Tony. I'm the boss in these parts. What brings the two of you to our neck of the woods?"

After David gave his pep talk about their mission and the camp meeting, Tony excitedly quipped, "I'm all in! I'm fed up with what these humans are doing. You have my word that I will help. Don't you guys worry. Tony's got you covered in these parts. I also have a friend named Edie; she'll help us get the word out. But, I do need to give you a word of warning. Keep away from the human that they call the governor. He hates animals. Why, he'll put you in a little cage and watch you suffer till you die." Then Tony left to enlist the support of his friends. David and Melissa knew the situation was serious, but it was a nice reprieve to meet such odd characters as Tony.

In New Jersey, they also met Tracy, who offer them shelter for the night during a horrific storm. In New York, they met Beth, who introduced David and Melissa to several of her friends, all of whom readily agreed to help organize for the mission. In Massachusetts, they recruited James, Marjorie, Michelle, and William, a powerful leader who held much influence over many tribes. They pledged to coordinate their efforts and to organize the entire state. William also encouraged Melissa and David to leave the Appalachian Trail and visit Cape Cod so they could see the Atlantic Ocean. He was so passionate that viewing the ocean would be such a remarkable experience for them, David and Melissa decided to take the detour.

It was an easy flight to Cape Cod. Much of the Cape had been overtaken with human settlement, but there were still some beautiful, untouched sections of shoreline. Melissa enjoyed the smell of the salty sea and the feel of the crisp breeze against her feathers. They landed on a deserted section of beach near Hyannis Port. Behind them were hilly dunes with wild grasses rippling in the sea wind, and before them was the endless gray-blue ocean. David and Melissa spied a lighthouse in the near distance and flew there. Landing on the topmost iron railing, they stared out at the continuously undulating waves. Suddenly, they saw movement and large dark shapes breaking the surface of the water. Both David and Melissa were elated, for they realized that these creatures, which they were seeing for the first time, must be the whales that Justice and Solomon had spoken about. They

listened carefully and then they heard it—the song of the whales. The experience was very emotional for both of them.

David and Melissa were still watching the whales when a rather portly vulture landed on the railing. He introduced himself as Teddy. “I heard that a vulture and his mate were coming to the Cape and that they were on a mission....”

Before Teddy could even finish the question, David interrupted, “That’s us.”

Teddy’s smile spread across his entire face. David explained his mission and Teddy readily agreed to help. He spent half an hour fervently affirming how important David’s mission was, and his cheerful encouragement raised the spirits of both David and Melissa. Teddy promised, “I assure you my mate and I will get your message out, and everyone around here will know about your mission and the camp meeting. Remember, if you are walking down the right path and you are willing to keep walking, eventually you will make progress.” With that advice, Teddy left.

Within the hour Melissa and David had more visitors, three young and very energetic vultures, who introduced themselves as Lori, Rene, and Moby. “We live near Woods Hole, not far from here,” said Rene. “We were in western Massachusetts and heard about the two of you and your mission from an organizer named William, so we flew directly to the Cape. We’ve been looking for you all morning because we really want to help.”

David summarized the mission, and he and Melissa quickly became excited when they discovered the three young vultures possessed special knowledge about whales and dolphins. David posed question after question to the trio, who eagerly answered. The exchange of information went on for an hour. By the time Lori, Rene, and Moby were ready to leave, they had staunchly affirmed that they would organize the whales and dolphins, whose songs would disperse the message of David’s mission to all creatures throughout the Atlantic and to creatures on the far side of the ocean.

Both David and Melissa were positively inspired. As twilight approached, they decided to roost in a tall pitch pine tree facing the ocean. They nestled and watched the sun descend; splendid streaks of rose, tangerine, and hazy blue eventually morphed into deep purple and then ebony. The night sky sparkled with a myriad of stars. Melissa uttered one last remark before she slept, “If the world could always be as peaceful as it is now.” They left Cape Cod the next morning, grateful for their detour.

Melissa and David flew back to the Appalachian Trail and continued northward. They made seven stops and each time encountered vultures who were eager to organize Vermont and New Hampshire. When they crossed into Maine, they were met by an enthusiastic group of young vultures—Fisk, Jayne, Patricia, Matthew, and Luann—who had heard rumors about their mission. David and Melissa were welcomed with sincere hospitality, and by the end of the day, the five had pledged to assist. Solidarity was their battle cry, and they pledged to organize not only Maine but also parts of Canada. They also committed to attend the camp meeting and to bring many other vultures with them.

David and Melissa were tired after their long sojourn, but the eagerness of so many others to help restored their vitality. Their trip had been a success and their goal to organize the northern regions was accomplished. The vultures they had met would spread the word across the Northeast and even into Canada. It was time to head home.

Chapter 9

Melissa and David flew homeward at a steady pace but did not fatigue themselves. They covered about forty to fifty miles a day. Late one afternoon they stopped by a park to satisfy their hunger and to find a place to roost for the evening. While exploring the area, they saw a fifteen-foot metal statue paying homage to a human inventor. David speculated, “How ludicrous that mankind builds these monuments and never considers how many times the invention, no matter how well intended by the inventor, is carelessly used to destroy the Creator’s creations.

“I agree,” responded Melissa. “Humans certainly do not remember the words from Proverbs 8:12, ‘I, wisdom, have made prudence my dwelling.’ Humans don’t often think about the consequences of their technology...the catastrophic effects it has when used in wars, or the pollution it causes. Neither do they consider the environmental disasters technology causes when it fails due to human error.”

David agreed, “You’re right. I truly believe humans think *they* are our great Creator. They automatically think that whatever they create is good.”

After a peaceful night’s sleep, they continued their journey homeward. The air stream was in their favor that day so they had an easy flight. In the late afternoon they stopped at a well-manicured grassy park with hundreds of colorful flowers, and butterflies galore, pale yellow and blue, fluttered everywhere. David and Melissa decided to spend the night in this paradise of nature and continue their flight the next day. They found a wooded area void of humans and settled in a tall scotch pine for the night.

Just after dawn David and Melissa left the beautiful gardens they had so enjoyed and resumed their flight south. Other than one stop for food, they flew for the entire day. The wind had not been in their favor this time, so when dusk arrived, they were exhausted. They stopped by a lake, scouted around for a place to roost for the evening, and chose a tall stately oak tree. A grove of smaller trees separated them from the water, but from their high perch, they could still see the lake and the ample wildlife that came out after dark—white-tailed deer, rabbits, raccoons, bats, and even a red fox. They also saw several bluebirds, goldfinches, and wrens snuggled down for the night amongst the branches. A red-tailed hawk flew over the lake in the twilight, and in a cove on the far side of the water, a family of wood ducks settled in for the night.

The next morning the two vultures left the lake and headed southwest. They flew for three hours before finding sustenance, and by the end of the day, they were in the mountains of North Carolina. That night they roosted in the top of a tall hickory that gave them a panoramic view of the countryside below. David and Melissa spent part of the evening reminiscing about how successful their journey had been and the array of volunteers they had gained. They slept quite contentedly.

David and Melissa slept late the next morning and then found food on the far side of a bridge where humans had thrown out cardboard containers of leftover food. Their hunger satisfied, they lifted into the sky for the final segment of their flight that would take them home to their tribe.

Word of Melissa and David's return the evening before spread rapidly. Just as the pink blush of dawn peeked through the tree tops, Melissa's father and mother, Ewart and Jasmine, who had eagerly been awaiting the couple's return, arrived to welcome them home. After hugs were exchanged, Ewart related the good news that during their absence there had been a steady stream of vultures visiting the clan asking for information about the mission and the camp meeting. Jasmine said that Lena had done an excellent job giving the information to the inquirers and dozens had promised to attend the camp meeting in October.

As the next few weeks passed, David spoke to dozens of visiting vultures about the mission and the camp meeting. He assured them all that the support of each one was needed if the mission to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High was to be successful. He strongly denounced the malfeasance of humans against other creatures and the earth itself and condemned man's corruption, depravity, and lawlessness, especially against its own species. Speaking passionately and convincingly, David emphasized the abomination of human wars and the devastation wrought upon the earth and its creatures as the result of those fruitless conflicts. He also often spoke calmly, yet with barely controlled emotion, about his own personal loss, the death of his beloved son, David Jr.

David invoked each listener to action and stamped his foot on the ground as he said, "Our mission is righteous; our mission is just; our Creator is with us; our spirits are high. The evidence demands that we proceed before the Court on Mount High. Seize this message of hope and deliver it to every creature in your region. It is our duty, our responsibility, not only to ourselves but also to our future generations. Let this mission reach the oceans so that whales and dolphins can sing it to the world. Let us forget no creature in our quest for justice, for all creatures, no matter how big or how small, are the creations of the Creator. United as one, we sing our song of hope. We are on our journey to change the world." Each vulture who heard David's entreaty gave his or her full support to the mission and promised to spread the word.

Chapter 10

After the long, hot summer of organizing, the vulture clans were eager for the camp meeting, especially since it was being held in such an idyllic place as Cedar Hills Tree Farm. The tree farm was, indeed, perfect for the camp meeting, a true oasis from human development. The farm was a reclusive habitat for thousands of trees, over sixty species in all, a peaceful solitude that brought serenity to the creatures who inhabited the area. Nestled in the tree canopy and sheltered with plenty of shade, the vulture tribes formed an extended community, completely enjoying their new circle of companionship. There were endless discussions and songs, as well as dancing, idle chatting, and even courting.

On September 25, the first tribe arrived, and new groups followed daily. On September 30, Nolan returned from the west and brought a delegation of renowned vultures. They had been impressed by his words but wanted to hear about the mission from David himself, so they had decided to attend the camp meeting.

David considered the gravity and propitiousness of this opportunity to speak with these representatives. He had volunteers organizing the entire Mid-West and East Coast. Whales and dolphins were already singing the message of his mission throughout the Atlantic Ocean. He had to inspire these visiting dignitaries so that they would organize the West Coast and rally not only other vultures but also inspire the whales and dolphins of that region to sing of his mission throughout the Pacific and to the far off lands across the sea. He had to inflame their hearts and spirits into believing that the creatures of Earth could prevail against the human race. David also knew that he had to get them to act quickly. Time was of the essence, for as soon as the human race became more aware of his mission, many of them would become openly hostile.

In the late afternoon Melissa and David flew to the area where her father, her brother, and the guests from the West Coast were roosting. Nolan made the introductions. The first was Caesar, the head of the delegation and somewhat stiff with age, but David recognized his name at once, for Caesar's reputation for leadership and spirituality were renowned. Then, David greeted Caesar's close friend, Betty, an older vulture, but she had a young, adventurous, and often mischievous spirit. Next, Nolan introduced Portia, Pamela, JoAnne, Kristen, Hilary, Emmylou, Ian, Angelina, and Dave respectively. After that group, Nolan presented Sarah, who was also from the West but from the vast northern nation of Canada. Sarah had a group of twenty-two vultures with her, all of whom instantly offered their services to organize the northern country. Finally, David and Melissa met Terri and Tippe, who offered their home as a place to stay if they ventured to the West Coast.

When late afternoon of October 2 arrived, David was energized, ready to give his speech. He flew to the top of the gazebo roof and looked out at his audience. The ground and trees were blanketed with vultures as far as the eye could see. The organizing efforts had been successful far beyond his expectations. Surely, he thought to himself, if even half of those in attendance carried the message forward, the whole world would know. David was not naive; he knew that many in the audience were just curious, not committed. If there was a vulture gullible enough to take on the human race, these curiosity seekers wanted to see him. David knew that the only way he could

succeed was to convert them to be active supporters of his mission. Within two minutes of his alighting on the gazebo, however, the thousands of loquacious vultures transformed into an arena of silence, waiting for David's first words.

David held his head high and spoke, "I have called you here this special day, October 2, because it is the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. What significance does the human Gandhi have for us you might ask? What do we care about some human? Well, Gandhi once said: 'The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated.' This is quite a statement coming from a human, but there is something else Gandhi said that is even more important for you to ponder, for in this wisdom you will understand the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, of the mission I speak about this day. Gandhi said: 'First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, and then you win.'

"I submit to you, my fellow vultures and all others that can hear my voice, that our Creator gave the human race a beautiful Garden of Eden. The garden was bountiful with all that any creature could need or desire. Yes, humans were surrounded by magnificent gifts bestowed upon them liberally by our Creator. But, the humans turned to thievery and stole from our Creator, taking fruit from the forbidden tree. These thieves were put out of the beautiful garden by our Creator's own hand, and they came to dwell in our lands. They continued to steal, and by the second generation, Cain killed Abel and started a reckless rampage of murder that has not ceased."

David's voice rose higher as he continued, "The human race can be summed up with these words—thieves and murderers."

Suddenly the crowd began to chant, "*Thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers...*," over and over until David had to flap his wings to quiet them so that he could continue.

As soon as silence was restored, David spoke again. "I say to you, my friends, the human race did not pass the second generation before their hands were covered with their own blood. Remember Genesis 4:9, 'Yahweh said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' He said, 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?' My fellow vultures, when Cain asked the Creator if he was his brother's keeper, the brotherhood of man ended and the travesty of war was born."

The crowd cried out, "*Thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers...*," and the chanting grew louder and louder so that once again David spread his wings, moving them back and forth, until the crowd became silent.

David took a few steps forward on the gazebo roof and then moved a few steps backwards, indicating to his listeners that he was bringing them into his inner circle. The crowd gasped at David's next words, for none of them had ever heard anyone speak so bluntly about the human race before. They were completely fixated on David. "The humans have been killing since their earliest days. They have waged over 1,400 wars, nations fighting nations to the death and killing everything in sight, even the innocent. It would be a struggle to find even one single day in all of the history of mankind when war did not rage in some part of the world.

"And there is no end to the humans' creativity in killing. We have just begun the twenty-first century...a little more than a decade has passed, and already there are 700,000 humans dead from

their endless warfare. And what about the number of other creatures killed because of these human wars? No one even dares to give an estimate because they are too numerous to count.

“And man’s weapons seem endless—rocks, knives, spears, swords, arrows, cannons, guns, bombs, tanks, fighter planes, missiles, poisonous gases, chemicals, and even radiation from nuclear devices. They watch their sons and daughters die horrible, gruesome deaths and then brag about their victory. What victory? What victory are they talking about? The human *victory* in war would be hell to any other creature. Who are these creatures we call humans? Why do they find contentment in the needless death and suffering of their own children? What creatures other than humans willingly expend their own children to save themselves? Think of it. Who dares to attack the lion’s cub? Who dares to attack the bear’s cub? Who dares to separate the baby elephant from the herd? Every other species on earth, except humans, protects its young at all cost. Humans vote landslide victories to politicians who advocate war, but when George McGovern said, ‘I’m fed up...with old men dreaming up wars for young men to die in,’ he found few votes to support his efforts to give peace a chance.

David paused for a few seconds to let his audience consider the gravity of his remarks, and then he continued. “Humans build memorials made of granite and bronze to honor their children who died in their wars. They boldly chisel the names of their deceased offspring on the granite as if they had accomplished something great by sacrificing their children. But, the children scream from their graves that their deaths accomplished nothing. Do we not despise humankind, not only for the injustice and suffering humans cause us but also for the wretchedness humans put their own children through?”

David took a deep breath and spoke again. “Humans hang plaques and signs naming the Ten Commandments in their court houses and churches and even on their lawns while they mock the Sixth Commandment—Thou shall not kill. Humans are impetuous and impatient for war. They exalt any leader that satisfies their lust for conflict, and if a leader seeks peace, he is perceived as weak, as a villain, as a traitor to his people. Humans! Humans glorify war and mock our Creator.”

David stopped for another moment. The crowd was mesmerized, eagerly awaiting his next words. “Humans...the great pretenders! They want us to believe that they love our Creator while, truly, they worship war.”

Again, a voice from the crowd shouted, “Thieves and murderers,” prompting the entire crowd to echo, “*Thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers....*” It took several minutes for David to quiet the audience so that he could continue.

“The human race is so full of pride they have become blind to their own greed. Have humans never heard that pride precedes a fall? They demand more and more, no matter how much they have or even if it goes to waste. Their greed puts every other creature in peril.

“Humans...they callously spread over five billion pounds of weed killers, insecticides, and fungicides on Earth’s soil; they call these chemicals pesticides. They claim it is to ward off pests, but who are the pests if not the humans themselves? Are the pests the animals, the fish, the bugs, the bees, the plants that grow naturally? Are these filled with greed? No, it is the human race that is filled with greed—it is the human race that is the pest. Millions and millions of fish are killed when these pesticides run off the soil into the streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Insects are being destroyed at a rapid rate. Over one million beehives, beehives that are essential to pollination and growing the very

food the humans want, are lost each year to these pesticides. Populations of bald eagles, white-tailed eagles, brown pelicans, falcons, hawks, and herons are decimated by careless use of human pesticides. Many mammals have suffered from the humans' use of a chemical called carbofuran. When carbofuran goes through the food chain and reaches mammals such as tigers, it kills them. In India ninety percent of the tiger population has been lost."

David's voice rose an octave as he became more emotional. "Humans...humans will destroy everything! We vultures are not immune—we can be eradicated too. In the past few decades the Oriental white-backed vulture has declined by ninety-nine percent and the slender-billed vulture by ninety-seven percent. Fewer than ten thousand red-headed vultures are now alive. The white-rumped vulture, the cape vulture, the Egyptian vulture, the griffon vulture, and the California condor vulture are also in accelerated decline.

"Pollution, loss of habitat, power lines, and chemical poisoning are devastating our species, killing us at the fastest rate since our creation. We will become extinct if humans do not change their ways." Again the chant...*thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers*...exploded from the assemblage. David took the time to catch his breath, inhaling and exhaling deeply. When he lifted his wings, the crowd quieted for they were athirst to hear what else he had to say.

"Humans," David cried passionately, "even kill themselves with their own pesticides! Over three hundred thousand humans die on the continent of Asia each year due to pesticides. These chemicals in the hands of careless humans contaminate their blood and cause brain, liver, and kidney disorders and cancer. You ask, as every creature on this earth asks, 'Why do humans do this?' There is only one answer. Yes, I say to all that can hear me, there is only one answer—the human race is so consumed with pride and greed and too lazy to do the necessary work to feed themselves naturally that they seek and utilize cheap, disastrous solutions."

Again the chant...*thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers*...spread feverishly through the crowd. David surveyed his audience and knew he had their support. He lifted his wings and the chanting halted. David spoke one word, "Deforestation," and paused for a few seconds. "Deforestation," he repeated. "The trees are not only disappearing in your habitats but also disappearing all over Earth...three billion, four billion, five billion, maybe even six billion a year. Hear me now, friends. I did not say *millions*, I said *billions*. The human race is destroying the rain forests where half the species on Earth live. Humans cut down more than 140,000 trees a day in the rain forests. Yes, do you hear me? Humans are responsible for this devastation to the rain forests, the lungs of our planet, rain forests that recycle carbon dioxide into oxygen, the very oxygen that every creature must have to survive, including the foolish humans. And, what do humans do with these beautiful mahogany and rosewood trees? Ironically, they hew them down to build coffins. Yes, they build coffins which they then burn up or bury in the ground. Who but humans would destroy their home—the planet Earth—to make a coffin?"

David pushed his chest forward and lifted his head high. His voice was icy clear as he spoke. "Who are these humans whose egos are so enormous that they need a rosewood coffin?" The rallying chant...*thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers*...echoed throughout the assemblage. Once again David spread his wings for silence. "Fourteen percent of the earth was covered with rain forests at one

time; now only six percent remains. Will humans not stop until they have cut down every tree? Each day 200,000 more acres are destroyed.”

David’s eyes pierced his listeners as he spoke. “Humans...humans are so greedy that they destroy the very things that they need to survive. Humans could not make the medicines they use every day without the plants in the rain forests. The medicine that humans need for their children with leukemia is extracted from the Madagascar periwinkle, which grows in the rain forests, yet humans continue to destroy the forests. Why? Why do humans hate their own children? Why do they not care enough about their children to leave them a planet they can survive on?

“Humans use chainsaws, disk saws, and bulldozers to clear the rain forests so that they can raise cattle to supply meat to fast food restaurants. Who...who, I ask you, would destroy the very essence of what is needed to sustain life on Earth so they could have the convenience of getting a sandwich? Who are these humans that they allow their own greed to destroy the planet that is their home?”

David stood completely erect and his eyes pierced his audience. “A tree is just another tree to humans. The destruction of an entire forest is just another tree to humans.” David bowed his head and there was absolute silence; he unfurled his wings to signify that his listeners remain silent. He leaned forward, his voice controlled, “Will someone...will someone make these humans understand that when they eradicate a forest, they destroy the homes of thousands and thousands of creatures? Humans...humans cut down a tree, destroying another creature’s home, to make paper that just gets discarded and, all too often, discarded as litter on the landscape.

“Four billion trees are hewn each year to make paper. And this paper just becomes trash. Each human creates 1,650 pounds of trash a year...each one! Just one nation, the United States, creates 200,000,000 tons of waste a year! All of this waste causes the loss of 24,000,000,000 tons of top soil every year, topsoil that is needed to grow the vegetation that so many creatures, including humans themselves, use as their food supply.”

Chapter 11

David slowed the speed of his delivery and set a new pace. As he viewed his audience, he knew they were listening to him intently. He began to speak again, "Humans...humans thrive on trash and they treat the oceans and seas as gigantic dump sites. Almost 1,400,000,000 pounds of trash are dumped into the oceans each year, and 12,000,000,000 gallons of municipal waste water are dumped each day. And, let's not forget the oil...yes, that precious oil that humans can't get enough of...650,000,000 gallons of oil spill into Earth's waterways each year. No place is sacred from human oil spills...5,000,000 gallons in Galveston, Texas; 68,000,000 gallons in Brittany, France; 140,000,000 gallons in Carmen, Mexico; 10,000,000 gallons in Prince Edward Sound, Alaska; 250,000,000 gallons in the Arabian Gulf; 127,000 gallons in Linden, New Jersey; 7,000,000 gallons off Nantucket Island, Massachusetts; and 336,000 gallons in Tampa Bay, Florida. The list is perpetual."

David's eyes locked onto his audience. "Let me tell you about just one oil spill...the misery that just one spill caused. Let's talk about some humans who thought they were so intelligent but managed to spill 200,000,000 gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, affecting 1,600 miles of coastline in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas. The flora and fauna in 68,000 square miles suffered hardship, anguish, and death. Do you hear me? 68,000 square miles! What were these humans thinking?

"I ask you, my friends, fellow inhabitants of Earth, does the human race lack common sense? Tar balls from this one oil spill continue to roll onto the shoreline to this day. More than 40,000 pounds of tar blighted the coastline of East Grand Terre Island in Louisiana. This disaster has caused ceaseless distress for the eco-system of the Gulf...8,000 birds, turtles, and mammals dead in the first six months...over 8,300 species have had their habitat turned into a toxic waste dump.

"And dolphins are dying from the spill, too. These gentle creatures come up for air and breathe in oil instead, oil that destroys their lungs and internal organs. For how many years afterwards do these oil spills affect marine life? No one knows, but dolphins continue to suffer lung and liver disease to this day. Sea turtles suffer a similar fate, and brown pelicans could become an endangered species because their eggs now have petroleum in them. Large populations of shrimp with no eyes and fish with lesions are being born. No one knows if the Gulf will ever return to its natural state.

"There are now dead zones in the Gulf where the oxygen is totally depleted, a lethal situation for marine life. But, the appalling factor, my friends, is that the human responsible for this devastation, Chief Executive Officer Tony Haywood, told the *Guardian* newspaper, 'The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume.' He said this as thousands of gallons of oil were pouring into the Gulf of Mexico every day." David took a step forward and scrutinized his audience. Everyone was silent, waiting for David's next words.

"Eight thousand," David yelled, "8,000...." Again, David yelled, "8,000 creatures dead and more dying...an environmental catastrophe that could end the existence of some species, and Tony Haywood, that brilliant CEO, acts inconvenienced because he has to stop the disaster and clean up the

mess. Haywood complained to reporters that he would like his life back.” David shook his head and sighed deeply. “CEO Haywood needs to know that all of the 8,000 creatures would like their lives back too. CEO Haywood needs to explain how he is going to save the brown pelican and other species of the Gulf from extinction. CEO Haywood needs to explain why he caused so much pain and suffering...all in the name of greed!”

David’s eyes stayed locked on his audience and his wings were spread wide. “Someone, yes, someone needs to remind CEO Haywood that Genesis 1:1 states, ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’ Someone, yes, someone needs to ask CEO Haywood why he is destroying what the Creator created.”

A voice in a tall cedar tree at the far end of the field screamed, “Thieves and murderers,” and again the crowd chanted, “*Thieves and murderers, thieves and murderers....*” David relaxed his wings and caught his breath. He let the crowd chant for a while. His sharp eyes watched a family of raccoons that had been listening attentively to his speech at the far edge of the field. Then, he spread his wings for the crowd to quiet down.

David tucked his wings back to his sides. “Genesis 1:20 says, ‘God said, ‘Let the waters abound with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the sky.’” David tilted his head and questioned his audience, “Why, my friends, why is CEO Haywood destroying the water that the Creator said should bring abundance? Why does he hate the earth so intensely? Has this human placed himself above our Creator? Is CEO Haywood an anomaly or does he represent all mankind? If he is an anomaly, why haven’t the humans put him in jail?”

Then someone in the crowd hollered, “Haywood needs to go to jail,” and the crowd chanted, “*Put Haywood in jail, put Haywood in jail....*” David lowered his wings and allowed the crowd to continue its chant. Then, he lifted his wings and the chanting abated. David yelled, “Why...why do the humans not do anything about their global warming? Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels, methane emissions, deforestation, chlorofluorocarbons, and chemical fertilizers are causing global warming. The Arctic ice is rapidly disappearing. Temperatures are dramatically increasing in western Canada, Alaska, and eastern Russia. Where do you go if you are a polar bear or a penguin? Montana’s Glacier National Park is melting away. Sea levels are rising, and heat waves, floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and droughts are increasing. The coral reefs are dying. In the next fifty years, if humans do not dramatically decrease the amount of carbon dioxide that they release into the atmosphere, thirty percent of our present plant and animal species may become extinct. Humans could stop global warming but they refuse to change their ways. We ask again...why is mankind so intent on destroying the earth? Do they loathe themselves? Do they despise the Creator? Why do they hate all that is good?”

David paused and bowed his head as he weighed his next words. There was total silence in the audience, for they were pondering the questions that David had put before them. Then, he lifted his head; his voice was very emotional as he continued. “You know the answers... yes, you know the humans. But, the humans would be shocked that we even dare ask these questions.” David’s voice got louder. “Yes, humans would ask, ‘Who are these creatures who are bold enough to challenge us?’ The humans...yes, the humans would ask, ‘What gives these creatures the right?’

"But I will tell you, my friends, what gives us the right. It is because over 56,000,000,000 of us are slaughtered every year by humans. Testing laboratories use 100,000,000 animals a year in their experiments; these creatures face a miserable fate, an endless river of pain that could fill the mighty Mississippi River from one end to the other and still cause a flood. Much of this testing is done for cosmetics. Just because some humans want to beautify themselves, chemicals are forced into helpless creatures who suffer and then die...millions of cases of cruelty. Have these humans lost their minds?

"But, there is more. Over 20,000 greyhounds were killed last year...killed because they couldn't run fast enough. Of these, 7,600 were just puppies. The deaths are almost innumerable. Humans force cocks, dogs, and even stallions to fight to their deaths, just for entertainment and profit. At the Yulin Festival in China, at least 10,000 dogs and 4,000 cats were slaughtered by being electrocuted, set on fire, and then skinned alive. And, this vicious mass murder was done in the name of fun. My friends, just one leather factory in China cuts the throats and rips off the skins of over a hundred dogs a day in order to make leather gloves, belts, and cat toys. What kind of people are these Chinese?

"About 350,000 baby seals were clubbed to death. Gorillas, chimpanzees, tigers, elephants, and whales are slaughtered in such numbers they may not survive as a species if humans continue their killing sprees. The number of animal species suffering, dying, and facing extinction goes on and on. There is too much misery, too much suffering. And then humans are indignant that we dare to question them. We question them because we are the ones paying with our blood and our lives!"

"Even family pets are not immune. Thousands of pets get neglected, beaten, mutilated, burned, starved, poisoned, kicked, stabbed, dragged, hanged, and drowned." David strained his neck forward and shouted even louder. "Cruel, cruel...that is what these humans are."

"Yes, unequivocally yes, we dare to ask the human race what they are doing! Yes, we dare to petition the Court on Mount High! Our petition will not be one of simple paper and ink...the paper will be our needless suffering we have endured, and the ink shall be our blood that has been spilled at the hands of humankind. If humans ask why, we shall unfalteringly look them in the eye and proclaim, 'Because we are creatures of the Creator.'"

The crowd began chanting, "*We are creatures of the Creator...We are creatures of the Creator....*" David let the crowd vent their rage for a full five minutes. Then he unfurled his wings to their full extent and soon everyone became quiet once again. No one wanted to miss the next words that David would speak.

David spoke softly when he resumed. "Some might say that we should wait to see if the human race will change and do better. My answer to them is that the waiting-for-humans-to-do-better road is littered with carcasses, the carcasses of those who wishfully hoped the human race would do better tomorrow. We have been waiting for thousands upon thousands of years for mankind to do better. Every new technology mankind acquires leads to more suffering and more dying for every other species. Humans have never and will never draw the line and say, 'We cannot go there.' Humans are incorrigible. They need a wake-up call, a call to practice good will, a call to show compassion, a call that will wrench their very souls and bring them to a new reverence for all that the Creator has created.

"I say to you, my friends, you do not have to take my word for the pitiful condition of the human race. Isaiah 56:11 says, 'They can never have enough. They are shepherds who can't understand. They have all turned to their own way, each one to his gain, from every quarter.' When humans treat each other with horrible disrespect, scurrilous maiming and killing, and bold declarations of war, why should we assume that in time they will treat us with respect and justice and value our lives? As long as humans, in their present condition, roam the earth, tragedy can fall upon any of us at any moment.

"Such tragedy has befallen my mate, Melissa, and me. Our son was murdered by a human, run over, not by accident, but by deliberate meanness. A male human ran his truck off the road on purpose to strike down my beloved son. Then, he got out of his truck and laughed about the despicable act with his vile companion. My mate and I have cried till there are no more tears. That senseless, vicious act is what has brought me here today. I call upon you and every other creature on Earth to take action against mankind. My grandfather, long before my time, had been pronouncing that the vultures needed to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High. The time has come. Mankind is reprehensible. Let us remember those famous words of Parkinson: 'Delay is the deadliest form of denial.'"

As David paused, a cry exploded from the crowd, "*To Court on Mount High, to Court on Mount High....*" David rested for three full minutes while the crowd chanted, and then he continued. "We shall not petition the Court with malice in our hearts, not with meanness, not with hatred, not with revenge. Our petition shall be one of love; our intent is not to harm the human race but to save the humans from themselves. The Creator is love. The Creator will identify with a petition of love.

"We will ask for only what is in the Good Book, 2 Chronicles 7:14, 'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.'" The crowd was astonished, for the Biblical verse epitomized exactly what needed to happen.

David assured the crowd, "We have acquired the keen legal skills of the renowned bald eagle, Justice." There was a unified gasp of approval from the listeners because they all knew of the lawyer's reputation. "We have also acquired the advisory services of the scholarly owl, Solomon." There was another gasp from the crowd, for they all knew about the legendary wisdom of Solomon. "We praise our Creator for the guidance of Justice and Solomon, for they are truly a gift of promise. They give us the credibility we need to convince the other creatures of Earth to join our cause."

David stood tall, head high, his eyes moving from one section of the crowd to the next, communicating that each and every one of them was included in his mission. His voice was clear and penetrating. "I call you to action, my friends. We must take our message to every corner of the earth, to every creature. Farther and farther we must travel for the cause is just. We must cross the hills and mountains, the rivers and lakes, the woods and forests, the plains and deserts; we must carry our message to the whales and dolphins so that they can traverse the great expanses of water to other lands and sing our message to all creatures of the world.

"Let our voice have life for our voice speaks of love. Our ancestors tell about the humans who were being held in bondage by other humans. Those slaves sang songs filled with spirit. They could be

heard from one plantation to another. Their songs were filled with passion and complete devotion to the Creator. 'I'm going home over there...I'm just going over Jordan...I'm just going over there...I'm going home to see my Jesus.' These songs were heard by our Creator, and our Creator no longer allowed the slaves' agony to continue. Solomon, who is filled with wisdom, says the whales and dolphins can sing such a song for us. Imagine every creature on Earth united, united in the simple declaration: I am a creature of my Creator!"

David took a step forward and shouted with all the energy his body could muster. "I am a creature of my Creator! I am a creature of my Creator!"

Then the crowd seized the words and chanted them over and over. "*I am a creature of my Creator...I am a creature of my Creator...!*"

David let the crowd vent their energy, and then he raised his wings for them to become quiet. It took several minutes for the chanting to recede to silence. "I believe...yes, I believe we can be united. It is our responsibility to take action, for we vultures were born with the instinct to survive. Let us proceed with compassion, with care and love in our hearts for every creature on Earth, not as warriors who are prepared to kill but as creatures of peace. Let our dreams be transformed into hope, our hope into faith, and our faith into action. Our actions must be so filled with love that our Creator will be compelled by this love to hear our plea before the Court on Mount High, for our Creator is our salvation. The sacrifice has been great. The blood that has been spilled must unite us. We must act as one force, one power." David's bald head rose higher, and he bellowed, "United, united, united."

In unison the crowd responded, "*United...united...united....*" Again, David allowed the crowd to echo their chant for a while, and then he raised his wings for silence.

"We must start not a revolution but rather an evolution so that we move toward what our Creator has spoken in Revelations 21:5, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Let all that are committed to bringing the human race to face the Court on Mount High say amen."

The crowd enthusiastically shouted, "*Amen...Amen...Amen...*," over and over. David flew down from the gazebo and was immediately surrounded by a wall of well-wishers who praised his speech and offered their support. The first ones he spoke to introduced themselves as Goodall, Cromwell, Simmons, Tracy, Coco, and Goodwin. However, David was soon so overwhelmed with the multitude wishing him success and offering him their help that he could no longer keep track of individual names. Melissa was also surrounded by supporters. She glanced at David, delighted that this remarkable vulture was her mate. Many hours passed as one group after another guaranteed their support. There were no naysayers to be found; all were committed to the mission. The stars had long twinkled in the velvety sky before David and Melissa were finally able to retreat to their roost.

Early the next morning, much to his surprise, David found the renowned Caesar perched on a tree limb a few feet away. Caesar had been there for a while, patiently waiting for David to wake up. "Good morning, David," said Caesar. "I was quite moved by your speech last night and did not want to leave without telling you personally that I am committed and will help."

"I'm honored," replied David, "that someone of your revered stature would volunteer to help my mission."

“We are never so strong that we do not need help,” spoke Caesar. “I am very enthusiastic, and I can organize the regions far west of here for you. I am friends not only with many tribes of vultures but also with many other species of our Creator, and they hold me in high esteem because I promote non-violence. I am pleased that the mission is ambitious enough to include all of Earth’s creatures.”

David was impressed by Caesar’s emotional energy and his non-wavering commitment to the mission. He felt encouraged and emboldened by Caesar’s words and thanked him for his support.

“Remember, my friend,” said Caesar, “we draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. We shall endure.” With these words, Caesar spread his wings, hopped a few steps, and then leaped into the air. His companions soon followed, and within seconds they were soaring high, heading west.

David and Melissa spent the morning reflecting on all that had happened. The whole mission seemed surreal now that all the parts were actually coming together. David wished he could talk to Justice and Solomon about the mission’s progress and wondered what they were doing.

Chapter 12

Months of more organizing passed. Fall gave way to winter and winter to spring. Finally, the last week of May arrived, the time for David to reunite with Justice and Solomon at the falls. Both David and Melissa were confident that they had done everything possible to unite all of the world's creatures to support their mission. Positive reports about one species after another joining the cause were coming in every day from their grassroots network of volunteers.

David did not know what to expect when he met with Justice and Solomon. Maybe they would think that more organizing would be needed, but both Melissa and he felt overwhelming progress had been achieved. Melissa decided to accompany David to the falls, for she was enthusiastic to meet the legendary Justice and Solomon. The couple elected to leave two days early so that they would have time to relax before the appointed meeting.

Melissa and David selected her brother Nolan and her sister Lena to meet with any guests till they returned. By noon they were flying toward the falls. Their flight was leisurely and they found food on the side of a highway.

When they reached the waterfalls at Little Sugar River, they playfully soared high in the sky and then nose-dived toward the river below. Up high, they surveyed the entire area with their sharp eyes to detect any humans in the vicinity. Then Melissa and David landed in the ancient sycamore tree, where they had had their first date, the one they had named the Tree of Life. They both napped, one of many they would enjoy during the next two days.

When they awoke on the morning of May 30th, Justice and Solomon had already arrived and were having a lively discussion about the best strategy to employ at the trial. When Solomon noticed that David and Melissa were awake, he prompted, "Well, good morning, David. Please introduce us to your lovely mate."

After introductions, Justice immediately assuaged any fears the two vultures had about their organizing. "Congratulations, David and Melissa, your organizing skills were amazing. I am happy to report that the angel Jeremiel has reported all the creatures of Earth have ratified the petition." Justice beamed, "I can assure you that several million species are now united to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High. And," Justice glanced playfully at Solomon, "with the assistance of the great and wise Solomon, our petition has been granted; the trial will begin on the 10th of December. The humans have been duly notified and they are, needless to say, in a state of utter disbelief."

David and Melissa were elated with the announcement.

Solomon agreed with them. "I believe this is wonderful news. We have, indeed, jolted the human race. This summons to Court represents a complete reversal of their belief that they can do whatever they want and have complete immunity. Word has it that, with the exception of a few astute humans, they had totally discounted our ability to communicate, even with one another. I believe we will succeed in proving the human race has forsaken the Creator's natural, harmonious arrangement with all creatures and with Earth itself."

Then Justice spoke up, "Solomon and I have been working on the case diligently. We have received a message from the angel Angela that Archangel Zerachiel, whose very name means God commands, has set the rules of order for the trial and will be choosing the judge and jury. According to the rules, each side can only present one witness. However, other witnesses can be called at the judge's discretion. First, the attorneys for each party, the plaintiff and the defendant, will give an opening statement. We will then present our witness, and the defense attorney will cross examine our witness. Then the defense will present their witness, and I will cross examine their witness. After this, if the Court wishes to hear any other witnesses, they will be called. Finally, each side will present its closing argument."

"Do we know who the human attorney and witness will be?" asked Melissa.

"We do not know who their witness is yet," answered Justice, "but their attorney is the infamous Sly Neocon. Solomon has researched his background. Neocon is an extremely presumptuous and brash man, known for his foul language, very impetuous and short-tempered. In the courtroom he has a reputation for being merciless and tearing witnesses apart with his questions. Neocon is an advocate of war and has made a name for himself by successfully representing fraudulent military weapons traffickers. It is well-known that he does not like children and has openly opposed their educational needs that would give them a head start in life. The only thing greater than Neocon's dislike of children is his disregard for the earth's environment, which he sees as a commodity to be used up. Neocon's arrogant and cavalier attitude often leads him to make wild, erroneous statements, and because of his egotistical nature, the opinions of others about what he says or does are of no concern to him."

"However," spoke Solomon, "Sly Neocon has never done a trial like this before. His normal tactic is to bully the plaintiff into settling before a case goes to trial. He tries to make others look like fools, trivializing their position by suggesting that they are incoherent and irrational." Solomon had a twinkle in his eye as he continued. "But, Sly will not be bullying anyone at this court. With Zerachiel in charge, the judge and jury will be distinguished masters of justice and well-prepared to discern the difference between the salient truth and an excited outburst suggesting truth."

Justice looked at her three companions and stated, "I would like Solomon to be our witness. I think this will demonstrate our solidarity to the Court."

Solomon immediately protested, saying David was capable of being the witness. It was quite clear that Justice had not discussed this with Solomon beforehand. She had quite wisely waited until the presence of David and Melissa could help convince him. Justice addressed Solomon, "An owl giving evidence about the plight of vultures and other creatures would seem more impartial, don't you think?" Justice abruptly seemed to think of something else, and she turned to David. "I do apologize, David, for my boldness. This was your mission. Would you prefer that either you or Melissa be the witness?"

David and Melissa, without hesitation and in unison, agreed that Solomon was the best choice for their witness. David stressed, "It is important that we convince the Court that humans need to change. Solomon can do that. We are overjoyed that our case has made it before the Court on Mount

High and there is a chance for justice.” Solomon was still unconvinced, but David and Melissa pleaded with him. “You are the only one, Solomon, with the knowledge to give us victory,” urged David.

Then, Melissa touched Solomon gently with her wing, took an emotional breath, and added, “Please, let my son have justice.”

Melissa’s plea touched Solomon’s heart, and he nodded. “All right,” he agreed, “I will be the witness.”

“Good,” said Justice. “That’s settled. Let’s see what kind of defense Sly Neocon can put up against a wise owl.”

After a short break the four of them regrouped. Solomon said, “My thought is that the focal point of the case, Vultures vs. Human Race, should be the malicious behavior and crimes of humans against humanity; we need to speak about the evil that humans do to one another, as well as to other creatures and the earth itself. I think that this tactic will catch the humans off guard. They will expect us to base our argument only on how much humans have destroyed other creatures and the environment, but if we can coax the jury into seeing how malevolently humans treat one another, there will be no doubt about how banefully they treat other creatures and the earth.”

David looked at his mate and smiled. “I told you Solomon was one shrewd, insightful owl.”

“Anything we can do to show human malfeasance will help our argument,” said Justice. She then began to explain what their demeanor should be in court, including how they should answer questions from the judge if they were asked any. David, Melissa, and Solomon listened carefully. They all agreed to meet at Wilson Creek at the Little Lost Cove Creek Waterfalls on December 3rd, one week before the trial date. At that time they could discuss any last minute details and make final preparations. Justice assured Melissa and David that she and Solomon would work assiduously on the presentation of the case and have everything prepared by the time they met at Wilson Creek.

Soon, David and Solomon were discussing the state of affairs on Earth, so Justice and Melissa walked slowly out beyond the trees to a meadow to have their own “girl talk,” for they thoroughly enjoyed each other’s company. Just before they returned to Solomon and David, Justice confided, “I am so happy that you are actively involved in this case, Melissa. I don’t think David could have accomplished all of this without your support.” They embraced and the bond of sisterhood was complete.

When the two females returned, David was eager to leave and return to their tribe to tell them about their success, that the case against the human race would go before the Court on Mount High. Melissa and David bid their good-byes and again stated how thrilled they were that Justice and Solomon had made it possible for them to bring their grievance to the highest court. They leaped up, flew high, and caught gusts of air that propelled them toward home. They had confidence that Justice and Solomon would receive the manna they needed to create the miracle of justice for all species on Earth.

Chapter 13

The next few months passed with an endless stream of visitors wanting to hear about the strategy for the upcoming trial. It seemed that everyone wanted to give advice on how to win the case. Some suggestions were useful but most of the ideas were absurd. Some of the visitors even suggested that David and Melissa shouldn't go because the humans were trying to trick them. Throughout it all, Melissa and David remained polite, telling their visitors that they would consider their advice. The best visitors, though, were those who simply came to offer their encouragement and prayers.

David took some time every day to spend alone with Melissa. He wanted her to know how much her belief in him meant, and he appreciated all of her assistance in their organizing efforts. David constantly let everyone know he could never have accomplished his mission without Melissa's support. They were also able to spend some time with each of their tribes. Keeping busy helped ease the pain they felt each time they thought of their son, David Jr. Both of them were often on the verge of depression, but, thankfully, when one of them would sink into melancholy, the other was there to offer cheer and hope.

The summer season flew by, the fall foliage faded, and the end of November was near. Melissa and David decided to leave for their rendezvous with Justice and Solomon a few days early. They wanted their flight to be leisurely so that they could relax before the final discussions preceding the trial.

They flew up the Little Sugar River and then north. They stopped for water at a small pond at the edge of a wooded area and found themselves in the company of several ducks, some roosting on the banks, some paddling about in the pond. The abundance of trees made it a great place for the two vultures to rest for a while. Then they proceeded north toward South Mountain, where they stopped to rest again. The park there had a magnificent waterfall, called High Shade Falls, which dropped eighty feet to the stream below. The landscape hosted several towering trees, so since it was late afternoon, they decided to spend the night. David spotted food along a dirt road that wove through the woods. After satisfying their hunger, they roosted for the night in a tall pine a short distance from the falls.

The next morning David and Melissa continued their flight, and by afternoon they reached Crabtree Falls, a splendid sight with a stream of mountain water falling seventy feet into a clear pool below. In a near-by meadow they found an abundance of food left behind by human campers. They rested by the falls for a while. The forest was a vivid green glimmering against the granite bedrock. Crabtree Falls was such a tranquil spot that David suggested they spend the next few days there, and Melissa readily agreed. The distance to Wilson Creek, the rendezvous site with Justice and Solomon, was less than three hours away. This would give them plenty of time to rest and enjoy the serenity of the mountains before the trial began and the tenseness which would accompany it.

Early on the morning of the third day of their stay at Crabtree Falls, they saw an Anna's hummingbird plummet toward the falls at tremendous speed. Then, there was a loud popping sound

from his tail feathers as he abruptly zoomed upward again. David and Melissa admired his beautiful reddish-orange throat feathers. When he spotted the two vultures, he quickly flew to them, settling on a nearby branch. In a high-pitched warble of *tik tik tsik* and *chirp* sounds, the hummingbird communicated to David and Melissa.

"I am Immanuel," he excitedly said. "I know about your mission and I am committed to your cause. More importantly, though, I have come with a warning that there are humans who are going to try to dupe you by telling you that the location of the trial has been changed to Caney Fork at Judaculla Rock. Please, it is imperative that you are not deceived and that you do not change your course. Continue to Mount High. Judaculla Rock is the devil's courthouse. Eons ago, the Creator established a celestial court on Mount High to judge the malevolent behavior of humans when, in His sight, they became too corrupt and consumed with violence.

"When our Creator established the Court on Mount High, the devil was jealous and tried to trick people to go astray by telling them the court venue had been changed to a cave near Judaculla Rock. As soon as anyone entered the cave, he or she was murdered. Before long, the devil found it necessary to cover up his crimes so he sent his henchman, Judaculla, a giant with slanted eyes and supernatural powers, to guard the cave. That's how the rock got its name. The rock still bears Judaculla's handprint from long ago when he slipped and almost fell. Please do not be swayed to go there! Stay on your present path."

David and Melissa listened carefully to Immanuel's warning. "I have done my part," he chirped. "Your journey, your mission is our salvation. Present our united declaration on Mount High. You will be the voice of every creature on Earth. As you plead our cause, the earth will be silent, not a sound will be heard. We all shall listen for the judgment from Mount High." Then Immanuel darted off, disappearing as if he had never been there.

David and Melissa did not need to speak aloud about what had just happened; instinctively each knew what the other was thinking. They lifted into the air and headed toward Wilson Creek, where they would reunite with Justice and Solomon.

About an hour later, they flew over a highway and spotted a carcass, the casualty of a vehicle; it was a good time to stop to eat. David and Melissa were almost finished when an automobile drove past slowly and then pulled to the side of the road a short distance beyond them. They kept their eyes focused on the human who got out. He was a short, heavysset middle-aged man. He started to sing a song; at first tone was so low that the words were not understandable. Then the words became clearer. "The trial location has changed. It is at Caney Fork. You will go to court at Judaculla Rock." The words were repeated over and over.

Melissa and David were almost mesmerized by the man's voice, but the hummingbirds' warning had prepared them. David signaled to Melissa that they needed to leave quickly, but they were trapped by the guard rail behind them and a stream of cars, trucks, and tractor trailers before them. The man suddenly stopped singing, moved to the rear of his car, and popped open the trunk. In a fluid movement, he pulled out a long-barreled rifle, pivoted, and faced them. At that moment, David saw a slight opening in the traffic. Abruptly he tapped Melissa with his wing, signaling her to go. She took

three hops and rose into the air, and David was right behind her. A tractor trailer missed them by less than two feet.

As they began to gain altitude, the gun exploded, creating a deafening echo. The first shot was followed by seven more, but the bullets fell below their targets. David and Melissa heard them hiss as they passed beneath their wings. Within seconds the fleeing vultures caught a forceful wind stream and swiftly rose in the sky. From the ground where the angry and frustrated human stood, the two vultures soon looked like tiny specks.

They flew with considerable haste for several miles, landed in a wooded area, and then took deep breathes to calm themselves. They had been terrified that the tractor trailer truck was going to hit them and then worried when they heard the gun go off. David and Melissa both agreed that there was, indeed, at least one faction of humans that did not want them to arrive alive at the Court on Mount High. They decided to stay away from the highway and to be extremely cautious if they came into contact with any more humans.

As soon as David and Melissa reached Wilson Creek, they located Little Lost Cove Creek Waterfalls. They settled on the limb of a sizeable old oak tree and watched the fast-moving water swirl over huge boulders, creating multiple small waterfalls, which splashed into a wide pool below. The view of the Blue Ridge Mountains was magnificent. As the sun was setting, they heard several familiar hoots coming from a maple tree a few hundred feet away and knew immediately that Solomon had arrived. They carefully peered into the growing twilight to make sure there were no threats and then flew to the maple tree where Solomon waited.

Before greetings were even exchanged, Solomon pressed, "Let's leave this area; it is not safe here. I saw some humans walking this way as I was coming to meet you. I convinced Justice to wait for us deep in the forest to make sure she remains safe."

David and Melissa followed Solomon as he flew away from the waterfalls. They followed the meandering creek till they spied a huge boulder, where they turned left, flew for another two miles, and then landed at the far corner of a small meadow. From high in the sky David had seen Justice briskly pacing back-and-forth on the limb of an ash tree. They all heard her sigh of relief when she saw them.

"I am so glad Solomon found you and you're all right. There is a group of humans that is trying to stop our appearance on Mount High; I was so worried that they had captured you...or worse," said Justice. Everyone could feel her nervous agitation. "Three different times on my journey here to Wilson Creek, I was almost shot. The first time I was resting in a tree, and the other two times I was flying. There were bullets everywhere; it was a miracle that I escaped."

"We were attacked too," said David, and he related their encounter with the hummingbirds, the warning they had been given about Judaculla Rock, and the attack by the singing man.

Solomon shook his head. "I did not want to upset you, Justice, more than you already were when we first rendezvoused, so I remained silent, but I, too, was attacked on my way here. I was asleep in an oak tree when the humans shot the limb out from under me. I am lucky they hit the thick limb and not me. I barely made an escape."

All four began to talk at once. After the initial shock of the common danger they shared, Melissa calmly declared, "We have been awakened to what we already knew...there is a faction of humans who are focused on destruction and violence. They have nothing to offer but terror to all who come in contact with them. We must not let them immobilize us with fear. It is imperative that our mission succeed, for the consequences of failure are too grave to imagine."

Justice, Solomon, and David nodded their heads in agreement. Then, Justice announced, "I need to get instructions about the final procedures at the Court on Mount High and submit the name of our witness. Night will be here shortly, so I will leave then, for darkness will give me some safety. I will also find out the name of the witness that will testify for the humans."

Solomon added, "Justice and I have been culling through many names and have picked a handful of likely ones so that we can be prepared."

Justice injected, "There are men and women who have favor with our Creator, and it will be difficult to disparage their testimony. If the humans use a witness that has the character of Mother Theresa, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oskar Schindler, or Nelson Mandela, their goodness may overshadow the failures of the human race."

"I think," spoke David, "the humans will choose a famous humanitarian like Gates, Buffet, Fenney, Saros, or Branson. President Jimmy Carter would be an excellent witness for the human race. He is a well-known humanitarian, who is spiritual, promotes peace, and believes humans can change for the better. He is extremely intelligent and is a humble person, but most of all his active charitable work is evidence of his convictions. And, he has a wife that the whole world admires."

"Then maybe we can induce their witness to side with us," Melissa responded. "If they choose a humanitarian, he or she is going to understand why we are petitioning for justice."

Solomon suggested, "I think they will pick a religious or spiritual leader like Pope Francis, who champions those in need of care, or the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, who teaches positive vision and compassion. However, it could also be Dr. Wayne Dyer, who teaches positive spiritual thinking; Rev. Dr. Katharine Schori, who advocates reconciliation; Christine Gutleben, who does outreach work; Sarah Withrow King, who fights for the ethical treatment of animals; or Carlos Malave, who advocates the reconciliation of all Christian churches. They would all be great orators and, thus, great witnesses."

Melissa then proposed, "Maybe they will pick a celebrity renowned for his or her love of animals, like Ellen DeGeneres, Betty White, Alice Walker, Jon Stewart, Martin Sheen, Howard Stern, Brad Pitt, Sarah McLachlan, Bill Maher, or Kesha Rose Sebert. There are many others, too, and any of them would make a great witness."

"Well," added David quickly, "one thing is for sure. If it wasn't for celebrities like these and dozens of others, many more species would be extinct. But, there are also many sports figures who favor fair treatment of animals, like Greg Biffle, Mac Danzig, and Hulk Hogan. Any of them, as well as "Sugar" Shane Mosley, Aaron Curry, Rich Roll, Tony Gonzalez, Chad Ochocinco, or Levi Leipheimer, would be an influential witness."

Justice finally gave her opinion, "Your suggestions are all possibilities, but the humans might be wise to pick a great environmentalist, and there are many they could choose from. But, I think we are

all going to be surprised whom the humans select. Their egos may get the best of them. We shall pray tonight before we sleep that I will return with good news tomorrow evening.”

Chapter 14

When Justice returned in the late afternoon, Solomon, Melissa, and David anxiously crowded around her. “Whom did the humans pick for their witness?” asked Solomon.

Justice stared at the ground as if she was reluctant to say. After several long moments she lifted her head. “You are not going to believe this....”

David glanced at Solomon and saw him straining, rapidly running names through his mind, and he saw Melissa barely containing her curiosity. Justice looked down at the ground again; it appeared that she was praying. Finally, Justice lifted her head; a tear had formed in the corner of both eyes. “They picked George, the warmonger,” she said.

Solomon, who always exuded a calm and composed demeanor, exploded. “They’re trying to trick us!” he shouted. “We cannot be this lucky. It’s got to be a trick!” Solomon began to pace, covering no real distance, just going back and forth within an area of a few feet. David was in shock, and Justice looked stunned as if the weight of the world had just descended upon her. Melissa was the only one to remain calm.

After a few moments of silence, Melissa spoke. “Their egos have gotten the best of them, for humans are full of self-pride. I think this is good news.”

Justice replied, “I don’t know. They couldn’t possibly choose George, the warmonger, if they weren’t up to some menacing, sinister scheme. No one could be that foolish.”

“No, no,” said Melissa, “the humans do not think they are being foolish. They view themselves so righteously that they don’t see what we see. They don’t see what our Creator sees.”

Solomon interrupted, “Could they possibly be that naïve? I was hoping they would make a poor choice, but nobody, and I mean nobody, could be that ignorant. George, the warmonger...George, the warmonger....” Solomon just kept repeating the name in total disbelief. Justice moved closer to Solomon and put her wing on his shoulder to calm him down. David just looked at the others in bewilderment.

Again, Melissa was the one to put things into perspective. “Look, George is a bully. Always has been. Yes, he is a warmonger but only when someone else is doing the bleeding and dying while he hides in a big office. He just picks a fight where and when he knows he has a superior advantage. Let’s not be frightened by this bully. Maybe the humans have some trick in mind, but that trick will backfire. Just think of how many times the evil tactics of George’s cronies have failed in the past. Everything he has been or ever will be was bought and paid for by his father. What we need to do is find the right questions to ask George on the witness stand. This is not a disaster; it is a miracle in the making!”

After several seconds, Solomon nodded, “George, the warmonger, is going to represent the entire human race before the Court on Mount High. I am stunned! I’m appalled by their choice, but I think you’re right, Melissa. This could be to our advantage.”

Justice sighed, “One thing is for sure—it is what it is. We just need to prepare carefully. This is the best opportunity we animals have had in thousands of years. We have no option but to win.”

The words of Melissa and Justice perked up Solomon. "Well," he said, "let me meditate for a while, and then Justice and I will plan our strategy; we can all gather in the morning to discuss our progress."

"Good," said Justice, "I'll start thinking of questions to ask George that will reveal his true nature to the Court."

David wandered off toward the forest. Melissa did not follow because she intuitively knew that he needed some solitude. She flew to a nearby pine and perched there, quite content that she had lifted the gloom from the others. She had found her personal mission within the mission. She would be the one to buoy the spirit of her colleagues, to energize them, to keep them united in their mission to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High.

By the next morning everyone was in high spirits. Justice and Solomon had worked late into the night on strategy and prepared an array of questions for the cross-examination of George and the order in which the questions should be asked. David and Melissa had a good night's sleep and were confident that Justice and Solomon would work out the details of the case. The four of them agreed to conduct a mock court in the afternoon; Justice would cross-examine Solomon, who would play the part of George.

After the meeting Justice went to work revising her questions some more, and Solomon roosted on a tree branch to get some much needed sleep. David and Melissa went for a short flight and landed along the bank of Wilson Creek. They were extremely careful not to be seen because they were fully aware that a faction of humans was intent on killing them.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, everyone reunited and the mock trial began. They hoped that these practice sessions would lead to more insight and strengthen their cross-examination. Justice asked questions systematically and with a driving force. Solomon was having difficulty answering because the questions were so pointed that it was almost impossible to give a response that would show the human race in a positive light. As Solomon struggled to answer, his replies would have been humorous if it were not for the gravity of the situation.

Justice asked, "Can you tell the Court, sir, why the human race is always at war?"

Solomon grappled with how George would answer and finally said, "Well, it's the other side that always provokes us."

Justice thrust back, "Why can't you talk out your grievances?"

Solomon played the part of George perfectly while answering this particular question. He looked astonished, as if the question had been ridiculous and the answer obvious. "Well, we don't have a talk department or peace department in the government...we have a war department."

David and Melissa chuckled to themselves because they knew no human was going to admit such a thing. David realized Solomon, who was so sagacious and truthful, was struggling with his assumed role as George, the warmonger, because he just could not imagine what the real George, a person who relished war and twisted the truth, would say.

For the next few days Justice spent each morning polishing the questions she would ask, and Solomon meditated, trying to figure out how George would answer. Then, in the afternoons the mock court was held. The court sessions continued to frustrate Solomon; despite his logical reasoning, he did

not understand George's natural ability to be deceitful. At one point, Solomon became so frustrated he screamed, "I have no idea how to act or how to answer a question like an idiot! Nobody, but nobody, can answer a question like that dolt George. He is an irremediable, slow-witted nitwit." Solomon's wings were lifted high for he had lost all composure. "What is the human race thinking?"

The evenings were spent discussing strategy, but after a couple of long sessions, Justice purposely shortened them so that they all had personal time to relax. Justice and Melissa often took this time to fly off by themselves for "girl talk" and left David and Solomon to their intellectual discussions. These evenings cemented their friendship.

Chapter 15

December 8th arrived. In a strategy meeting David, Justice, Melissa, and Solomon had decided that since there were humans who wanted them dead before they reached Court, it would be too dangerous for them to fly all together to Mount High. Justice would fly first, leaving in the early morning; Solomon would leave that evening and fly at night. David and Melissa would fly the next morning, leaving at dawn. They also made contingency plans in case one of them did not survive the journey.

After all of the plans had been finalized, they tried to rest, but a sense of trepidation permeated their mood. Each of them knew there was a possibility he or she might not survive the next few days. David was having doubts, which he did not vocalize, about getting Melissa further involved in this dangerous endeavor. His mind kept thinking that no one should have to face the struggles they were facing, but he knew destiny had captured them by divine decree, and their future, if there was to be a future, was in the Creator's hands. They ended the evening with heads bowed, praying to the Creator.

David and Melissa awoke at dawn to find themselves surrounded by eagles. Solomon had sent out a message that Justice needed a formation of eagles to protect her as she flew to ensure that she arrived safely at Mount High. A hundred and six eagles had answered the summons, and each one knew full well that he or she could be slain in the process. When the time came to depart, the multitude of eagles filled the sky, arranging themselves on all four sides of Justice, as well as above and below. She was perfectly camouflaged. As they climbed high in the rosy sky, no human eye could distinguish one eagle from another.

Melissa and David spent the day anxious over Justice's safety and apprehensive about their own flight the next morning.

Early in the evening Solomon came to visit. "I have good news," he said. "Justice arrived safely at Mount High. Unfortunately they did encounter trouble, and three of the eagles in the formation were shot out of the sky. There are also numerous reports that several other eagles in the vicinity of Mount High have been murdered. I will be leaving within the hour, my friends. I bid you a safe trip tomorrow, and we will reunite on Mount High."

There was a heavy silence between David and Melissa as they envisioned those who had lost their lives for the mission. As darkness seeped throughout the forest, they heard a cacophony of hooting from all directions, and they were pleased that Solomon would also have an escort. The noise continued for almost an hour. When it suddenly ceased, Melissa and David knew Solomon was on his way to Mount High, accompanied by a vast number of other owls. They said a silent prayer for his safety.

David and Melissa tried to sleep but found it so difficult they finally gave up. Instead, they talked about what their tribes were doing at home and what they themselves would do when the trial was over. One conclusion they agreed upon, though, was that if they both survived and made it back

home alive, they were going to have another baby. With this pleasant thought, they were finally able to fall asleep.

They awoke in the gray hours of dawn to find themselves surrounded by hundreds of other vultures. Solomon had arranged for them, too, to have a formation to accompany them to Mount High. David and Melissa were overwhelmed by the courage of their peers. They knew what these brave vultures knew—some of them might die on this pilgrimage. But, each vulture present was devoted to the mission—the human race needed to be judged by the Court on Mount High.

David and Melissa descended from their roosting spot and emotionally thanked their fellow vultures. Within a few minutes, two vultures, Ozias and Othni, brought David and Melissa food and told them that it would be an honor to protect them. Othni had been appointed commander-in-chief while Ozias was in charge of an elite squad whose sole duty was to keep David and Melissa in the safest spot of the formation until they reached Mount High.

Within the hour they were ready to leave. Othni placed one wing on David and the other on Melissa. “Do not feel anguish,” he said. “Have faith, for I am well-prepared and well-trained and shall not fail in protecting you.”

Then Ozias came forward and stretched his wings, one touching David and one touching Melissa. “You are our hope for an earth worth living on. When dreamers dream mighty dreams of heroes that will change the world, they dream of you, David and Melissa. Look around you...look upon your friends as far as the eye can see. All are willing to sacrifice their lives so that you can safely arrive at Mount High. My name tells you everything you need to know—I am Ozias and my strength comes from the Creator. Let us make haste.”

First, Othni ascended into the air, followed by ninety-nine other vultures. Next, Ozias told David and Melissa to follow him and his special squadron of thirty-three vultures, and they all rose into the air. Then, the remaining vultures, over three hundred of them, soared upward and followed in the rear.

The formation of vultures had traveled less than six miles when gun shots shattered the peacefulness. Melissa saw a young vulture five rows in front of her suddenly spiral downward. Her first instinct was to help, but as soon as she started to descend, Ozias tapped her wing, reminding her that they had to go on. He signaled to her that other vultures in the rear of the formation would help the casualties. The gun fire lasted just a short time and then ceased. The formation flew many more miles with no further attacks.

As the vultures were closing in on the last several miles of their journey to Mount High, they flew over a valley. Suddenly gunfire erupted again, much more intense than previously. The ring leader of the attack was a callous human named Duke, who had a total disregard for nature. He was the head of a nefarious conglomerate which had been responsible for numerous environmental disasters but so far had suffered no repercussions. He feared that his despicable deeds might be revealed during the trial and the last thing he wanted was for the authorities to begin an investigation. So, to prevent the trial from even beginning, Duke had hired about fifty men to fire their guns at any vultures they saw, promising each man a thousand dollars for every vulture he killed.

The attack, however, was not as deadly as it could have been thanks to the fast thinking of another human, a Vietnam veteran named Richard. He had purchased a Christmas tree farm in a nearby valley many years prior because he found working the land was therapeutic and helped him to cope with the traumatic stress he had suffered from the war. He also had a deep respect for nature and volunteered at an avian sanctuary, helping injured birds to heal so that they could be released back into the wild.

When Richard had learned of Duke's plot to ambush and kill the birds involved in the court case against the humans, he had tricked Duke into believing that the path the birds would follow was not over the valley where Duke and his men were but over Richard's tree farm. Duke had decided to split the group in half, keeping twenty-five men with him in the valley and sending twenty-five with Richard to the Christmas tree farm.

When the guns went off, bullets seemed to pummel them from every direction. David and Melissa were sickened and watched helplessly as several vultures, hit simultaneously, spiraled downward toward the earth. Immediately their adrenaline kicked in, and Ozias, who was now directly in front of them, picked up speed and gained altitude rapidly. David and Melissa flew faster and faster, matching Ozias thrust for thrust with their wings. Finally, they were beyond the valley of death and the reach of the guns. Melissa, realizing that forty of the formation had perished, sadly remembered the words from Genesis, 4:10, "...Blood cries to me from the ground."

The remainder of the formation of vultures landed on Mount High, and Melissa and David were brought to a cave where Solomon and Justice awaited them. Justice immediately hugged Melissa. "This area is safe," soothed Justice. "All of the creatures that live on and around Mount High are working in unison to protect it. Chipmunks and squirrels are on the ground and in the trees, working as sentinels and will chatter the alarm if any danger approaches; eagles and hawks are high in the sky, watching carefully all that is below; cougars and black bears are silently patrolling the woods; and otters and beavers are on high alert, protecting the water supply. There are also several squads of raccoons scouting the perimeter of the mountain; they will warn us of any danger even in the darkest hours of night."

Melissa released a sigh of relief upon hearing this and felt safe in the cave after the ordeal they had just gone through. With only one day before the trial was to begin, they all put the difficulties of the trip aside and began to work on the final details of the case. While Justice went over Solomon's testimony again, Melissa and David ate food that had been brought to them.

Then, Justice provided them with some final instructions about the demeanor expected in the court room. "We must be reserved at all times," she said, "even when we disagree or when a lie is being told. Always keep in mind the sanctity of the Court on Mount High and the holiness of our mission. The humans may try extreme methods to badger and intimidate us, but we must not allow them to make us look contentious.

"Our Creator will be represented by Judge Sophia, the angel of wisdom. She will listen to our case and convey our voice to Him. The jury will consist of seven archangels who will bring their findings to the Creator. The head juror will be Barachiel, who has dominion over the earth. The other jurors will include Pravuil, who is the record keeper for the Creator; Raphael, who is the healer;

Jegudiel, who represents the Creator's love and mercy; Uriel, who is the light of the Creator; Gabriel, who is the hero of the Creator; and Sealtiel, who is the intercessor for our Creator. There will also be a scribe, the archangel Metatron, who will write down what happens at the trial. He also has records of all deeds that have happened on the earth and in heaven and will know if anyone lies."

Solomon, Melissa, and David nodded and Justice continued. "The first order of business after court is called into session will be the opening statements. These will be brief, twenty minutes or less for each side. Then, we call Solomon as our witness. I will ask him questions first, and Sly Neocon, the humans' attorney, will cross examine. After Solomon's testimony, the humans will call their witness George, the warmonger; he will testify, and I will cross examine him. Next, Judge Sophia will ask any questions she has or call forward anyone else she wants to hear testimony from. Then, the Court will hear final arguments. After all of these steps, the jury will be sequestered to deliberate. Of course, during the proceedings, Judge Sophia can call a recess anytime she wants."

"How long do you think the final judgment should take?" asked Melissa.

"I really don't know, but I expect it will take a few days minimum," replied Justice.

Then David asked, "What if they ask Melissa or me questions?"

"Just be respectful and answer truthfully," said Justice. "We have prepared to the best of our ability. Let's relax now because we can do no more."

Chapter 16

The next morning everyone awoke early. The courtroom was less than a mile away and proceedings would not begin until ten o'clock, so there was a lot of nervous tension while they waited. When the time came to leave, Justice led the procession, followed by Solomon and then Melissa and David. The Court was a mammoth cavern which housed seven rooms. Outside and at opposite ends of the large courtroom were two chambers; one for the plaintiffs and one for the defendants. These rooms would serve as the residence for each side for the duration of the trial and allowed for total privacy. Justice, Solomon, David, and Melissa were escorted to their assigned chamber as soon as they arrived.

"The trial will convene in forty-five minutes," announced Justice. Although everyone already knew, she went over the protocol and procedures again. Conversing was better than stressful silence. They were all keenly aware of the urgency of the trial before them. They all realized its significance...this was the last chance for planet Earth.

Every minute felt endless. Solomon, who was seldom frivolous, joked, "Waiting for Court to commence gives a new meaning to the Scripture that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years." Everyone grinned. David brushed his wing affectionately against Melissa's to reassure her. The journey had been long, arduous, and dangerous. He looked at Justice and Solomon. They seemed to glow with their inner spiritual strength, and David drew from that strength as he prepared himself for the trial.

Finally, they were escorted into the courtroom, where they all blinked in amazement at the brilliance. The high albedo of the limestone walls reflected the natural sunlight coming through the holes on the plafond of the magnificent cavern, making the huge chamber bright with light. Within a minute, though, their eyes adjusted. Then, everyone rose as Judge Sophia was escorted to her seat, and she officially convened the Court. The Judge recited the procedures of the trial. David listened intently and found the explanation was precisely as Justice had told Melissa and him it would be.

To his right, David could see Sly Neocon, the attorney for the human race; he could also see George, their witness. George was glaring at Justice, a simulated smile pasted on his face, but his annoyed demeanor suggested that being at the trial was a huge inconvenience for him. David spread his wing slightly to touch Melissa, giving her reassurance.

Justice stood before Judge Sophia and the jury, ready to begin her opening argument. "Good morning, Your Honor and members of the jury...."

Suddenly Sly Neocon jumped up from his seat and hustled before Judge Sophia. He looked with disdain at Justice first and then at Solomon, David, and Melissa. Then, he turned his back to them and, pointing his right index finger at the Judge, haughtily expounded, "What I know is that the Creator gave us, the human race, authority over all other creatures on earth. This creature," said Sly, as he pivoted quickly and pointed his finger at David, "has no right to bring us to Court. We, the human race, are the rulers, the potentates, the most powerful of all. How dare this creature...a vulture, no less...question the authority of humans! I move for an immediate dismissal."

Justice protested, "Your Honor, I object."

Sly quickly moved toward Justice as if to do her bodily harm, but within milliseconds two angels were present, blocking his way, and Sly reluctantly stepped back.

Judge Sophia, her tone ominous, chided, "Sit down, Mr. Neocon, and control yourself in this courtroom. Remember where you are or you will find out about power." Then Judge Sophia looked down at Justice. "Please continue, Miss Justice."

Justice nodded. She stood firmly, her eyes strong with the conviction that due process would be done. "Your Honor, if you will indulge me, I must convey to you and the jury the facts concerning the history of this case. This case is not frivolous. This case was filed to address the travesties committed by humans against the earth and its inhabitants, including other defenseless human beings. Every species, including millions of members of the human race, are in agreement with the petition. We do not deny Mr. Neocon's statement that the human race was given authority over all other creatures on Earth, but we contend there is an implied responsibility within that authority to care for those creatures. The pivotal point of our case is that the human race has so abused its power that the privilege should be removed. We believe the Creator's intention was for the human race to protect all other species on Earth. The Creator's intention was a delegated authority of virtue and integrity, not one of destruction for destruction's sake. We come not in arrogance seeking power but rather to detail the countless malicious injuries the human race has caused. We contend that the survival of the planet Earth and every species on it, including the human race, is in danger due to the continuous detrimental acts of mankind."

Judge Sophia looked down at Sly, who was still standing, and said gravely, "Your motion for dismissal is denied, so take your seat. Let me warn you, Mr. Neocon, remember where you are and treat this Court and these proceedings with due respect."

Sly returned to his seat, and the Judge nodded for Justice to continue.

Justice spoke in a clear, strong voice. "I come before this Court today with a heavy heart. My clients' child was ruthlessly murdered by a human who had no respect for life, a death not caused by the natural order but for the pleasure of misery. If this murder was a single incident, an anomaly, then this death would just be a tragedy, but this, Your Honor and members of the jury, is not the case. The human race has endless wars, causing endless pain to every creature on earth, including humans. Mankind tortures and kills other species with malicious intent till entire species are completely wiped off the face of the Earth. Human pollution has escalated to the point that the survival of humans themselves is in question. Deforestation and global warming may eradicate half of the species on Earth over the next few decades.

"Another century might not come to pass if the human race does not correct its behavior. The earth will be uninhabitable. Industrial waste is debilitating and killing scores of species. Pollution has disrupted the water supply and killed fish and amphibians. Even sharks are afflicted with cancers from mercury put into the oceans and seas by humans. Harmful man-made chemicals abound in the food chain and poison plants, animals, and even humans themselves. Plant life is being destroyed at an alarming rate, and we all know that plants are a vital part of the food supply. My knowledgeable witness, Solomon, will enlighten us further about these facts in his testimony. The result of this

negligent and purposeful destruction, however, is that Earth...this beautiful miracle of our Creator... has become so burdened by the human race that it screams out in anguish.

"The creatures of the earth have united to bring this case before the Court on Mount High because they have heard Earth's cry of agony. The creatures of the earth come before the Creator's appointed Judge and jury to plead that the Creator's most magnificent creation, Earth, be saved from destruction and that the creatures of the earth be given the basic right that the Creator intended...the right of survival."

"Thank you, Miss Justice," said Judge Sophia. As soon as Justice was seated, Judge Sophia beckoned to Sly, "Mr. Neocon, please rise and deliver your opening statement." As Sly pranced to the front of the courtroom, the bright light reflected off his hairless head. Before he spoke, Sly breathed in deeply, causing the extra pounds he carried to seemingly disappear.

"Judge Sophia," Sly began. He had to look up as he addressed her, for she and the jury were both seated above the courtroom floor on a high dais, a location that denoted their stature. As Sly began to speak, he started to cough and struggled to get his words out, "The human... (cough)... race... (cough)...." Sly coughed again, more loudly this time, and finally gained his composure. "The human race rules the earth. That authority cannot be questioned. This Court has no authority over earthly affairs. We do as we please on Earth. The idea that any bird or animal...for that matter, any creature...should be of any consideration to the human race is inconceivable. What does the Court expect? Is the entire human population supposed to sit around worrying whether bears get enough to eat or elephants have enough water?"

Sly then pivoted to look at those present in the courtroom. "The eagle over there is talking about implied responsibility. Someone is always looking for a handout. This implied responsibility is just another welfare gimmick." Sly pushed his shoulders back and took in such a deep breath Melissa thought his chest would explode. "We kill bears because we want a rug for our floor. We kill elephants because we want the ivory. We kill leopards so wealthy women can dazzle us with fur coats. We shoot eagles and hawks for their feathers, and we shoot vultures so we can have a fun day. So goes the world. Humans dominate and lesser creatures weep. That is the way the world is.

"Judge Sophia, I, Sly Neocon, the most powerful lawyer in the world, say to you that these birds are arrogant and ridiculous to suggest that humans are the ones who cause pollution. Preposterous! They know...yes, those birds over there know full well that animals defecating all over the earth is the true cause of pollution. These birds say they are concerned about the earth's environment! They have no need to worry. By the time the human race destroys this earth, we will have found another planet. We, the potentates of the earth, have scientists working on that as we speak. When we find a new planet, we will consume and destroy it and move on to another. That is the way it is."

Sly turned and looked at Judge Sophia. "You see, Judge, the universe is huge. There is an eternal number of planets like Earth that we can consume and destroy. The universe is ours to inhabit, to do with as we want, and to destroy if we so choose." With those last words, Sly strutted to his seat and sat. The observers in the courtroom were astonished by Sly's words; even other humans present began to murmur.

Judge Sophia pounded her gavel and announced, “There will be a fifteen minute recess before the prosecution calls its witness.”

Chapter 17

Judge Sophia reconvened the Court. "Are you prepared for your witness to present his testimony, Miss Justice?"

Justice nodded in affirmation. "Yes, Your Honor. I call the learned owl Solomon to the stand." Solomon went forward to the witness stand and was sworn in.

As Justice began to ask her first question, Sly jumped to his feet and loudly exclaimed, "I object to this owl testifying! This case is Vultures vs. Human Race. A vulture should be the witness for the prosecution, not an owl."

Judge Sophia peered down at Sly and answered, "If you had taken the time to read the rules of this Court, you would know each side is allowed one witness. They can choose whomever they want. Mr. Neocon, your objection is overruled. The prosecution will continue."

Justice turned back to Solomon and asked her question. "Solomon, can you tell this Court the effect wars have had on the human race and other creatures?"

Before Solomon could utter a word, Sly jumped to his feet again and protested, "I object. Owls do not know anything about war or humans."

Judge Sophia looked down at Sly, "Your objection is overruled. Let me make this clear to you, Mr. Neocon. This Court intends to hear from the owl Solomon so make sure that any objection you make in the future has substance." Sly slunk back down.

Justice repeated her question to Solomon. "Can you tell the Court the effect wars have had on the human race and other creatures?"

Solomon answered, "Yes. Humans have killed and maimed an innumerable number of humans in countless wars. When I use the word *innumerable*, I mean so many millions that humans themselves cannot count the number. The twenty-first century has just begun, and we will soon pass a million humans who have died in wars. The environmental impact of these wars is staggering. They cause widespread famine, starvation, and disease. The number of humans left homeless due to wars could never be counted, even by the most brilliant mathematicians. War is absolutely destructive, an abomination. The Good Book tells us our Creator is love. War is the antithesis of our Creator."

Justice asked her next question. "What kind of weapons do humans use in these wars?"

"In the beginning of human existence," replied Solomon, "the weapons were primitive...rocks, stone blades, spears, swords, arrows. Then, humans progressed to guns, cannons, tanks, torpedoes, grenades, bombs, and fighter planes. Next came chemical weapons, missiles, and nuclear weapons. Because of the continuous advancement in weapons, if wars do not stop, the twenty-first century will have more deaths due to wars than the entire twenty previous centuries. The extinction of the human race and most other species will certainly happen if humans cannot find a way to live peacefully with one another. If humans accelerate the present wars into global conflicts, all life on Earth could conceivably come to an end."

"Solomon," asked Justice, "why do you think humans choose war when so many die and there is such destruction?"

"The question you ask," answered Solomon gravely, "is complex. There are so many reasons why humans choose war. First, I would say that human beings are spiritually immature. Humans choose to view the world totally from their own perspective and do not consider in any way why the Creator created the earth. Their egos are so inflated that they view themselves as the rulers of the world, the center of the universe. They think that they should never be questioned because they are infallible and always know the right choice to make. With so many humans taking this attitude, it is not surprising that war breaks out between different nations and cultures. Each side feels superior to the other. After humans begin a war, they use the Creator as a justification. In the politicians' minds the echo of their own egos becomes the voice of the Creator, and they begin to believe their own lies that the Creator is directing them. How could the Creator, who is love, possibly tell these politicians to mastermind wars? The answer, of course, is that He doesn't...He never has. Humans must come to an understanding that they are the architects of war, not the Creator. The responsibility for war lies solely with the human race, and all justifications for war are the lies of the human ego.

"The second reason why humans choose war," continued Solomon, "is tunnel vision. Humans on each side of the conflict choose to see only what they want to see. This quickly leads to a policy called *the end justifies the means*. The third reason for wars is self-serving bias. The members of one side believe they are more intelligent and more ethical than the other side.

"Perhaps a fourth reason why humans choose war is that when people are treated badly, they react badly. As a result, when a group of people is being treated unfairly economically and socially, when they are punished or imprisoned unjustly, or when they are injured or murdered maliciously, they will eventually revolt. To prevent war, there has to be justice and fairness in a society."

Solomon continued in his grave baritone. "The fifth reason for humans choosing war is the desire of one nation to ascend above or control another. Humans have an egotistical desire to dominate and a flawed moral rationalization. The sixth reason is historical grievances. This results when the weakened, oppressed group gains strength and seeks revenge or retribution against its former oppressors. A final reason for human wars is that misunderstandings escalate to animosity, then to divisiveness, and ultimately to physical conflict. There are many reasons for war, but there are never any true winners."

Justice directed her next question to Solomon. "How is the human race doing in regards to protecting the earth's environment?"

Solomon's answer was blunt. "Not well at all. The earth is quickly becoming an environmental disaster. Over five billion pounds of weed killer, insecticides, and fungicides have been put into the earth's soil. This has been extremely harmful to all species on earth, including the humans themselves. This has resulted in the eradication of more than 25,000 species a year and the endangerment of many others. Exotic mammals, such as the Formosan clouded leopard, Vietnamese rhino, and the Yangtze River dolphin, gather media attention when they become extinct, but more common birds, turtles, fish, snakes, insects, and micro flora and fauna go unnoticed. And, we must not forget that millions of humans die each year from these pesticides, and many others suffer brain, liver, and kidney ailments and cancer.

"The chemical pollution is astounding. Humans use over 70,000 different chemicals, and new ones appear literally every day. And, when these toxic chemicals are not disposed of safely, the result is pollution of both water and land. When these chemicals reach fields where crops are grown, they enter the food supply and become deadly, causing a variety of cancers and respiratory conditions. The water in the Yellow River in China is not safe to drink by either humans or animals, and over one-third of the lakes and rivers in America are so polluted it is unsafe to consume the fish from them. Mankind has caused so much pollution that there is a shortage of fresh water on the earth, so hundreds of millions of people drink contaminated water, which results in the death of millions of humans each year, as well as an untold number of deaths of other species.

"Ocean water is certainly not exempt from human contamination. Humans dump over 1,000,000,000 pounds of trash into the oceans, 12,000,000,000 gallons of waste water, and 650,000 gallons of oil. The Japanese have dumped over 2,000,000 gallons of radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean, and cruise ships alone dump 1,000,000,000 gallons of sewage into the oceans each year.

"Deforestation is also a problem. Humans cut down 140,000 trees a day in the rain forest, and we all know the rain forests are the lungs of the earth, providing massive amounts of oxygen, oxygen that is needed for every living creature on the earth, including humans themselves. Every day, day after day, 200,000 acres of forest are destroyed, which increases global warming.

"Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "A nation that destroys its soil destroys itself." It is estimated that 24,000,000,000 tons of top soil are degraded each year; deforestation, overgrazing, and agricultural activities are the three leading causes of this degradation.

"The Arctic is disappearing due to global warming, but humans do almost nothing to control their carbon dioxide emissions. Sea levels are rising. Heat waves, floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and droughts are increasing. The coral reefs are being destroyed. All of this devastation occurs because humans refuse to deal with their carbon-dioxide emissions.

"And, air pollution causes over 7,000,000 premature deaths of humans. Humans, as well as other species, die when they live too close to factories that produce toxic chemicals and the contaminated air is inhaled. Some of the effects of air pollution include kidney and liver damage, asthma, cancer, birth defects, miscarriages, skin rashes, nervous system damage, and developmental problems in children."

Solomon paused to take a deep breath and then continued. "Those are some of the most obvious results of the humans' mistreatment of the environment, but there are many more."

Justice took a few steps closer to Solomon and then asked her next question. "Why do you think humans cause all of these environmental problems if they are harming themselves, as well as other species and the Earth itself? What could possibly be their motive?"

Solomon did not hesitate with his response. "Greed. But then, one has to consider the genesis of this greed. It begins with the rationale that a little pollution does not cause that much damage, so then humans take more liberties and create more and more pollution and destruction. Once the cycle has started, the effects of the pollution multiply rapidly. The polluters do not see the resulting pollution anymore, just the products which they perceive to be absolutely necessary to existence. Thus, there is a need for more factories...a need for more vehicles to get people to those factories...a

need for more oil to produce the gasoline for those vehicles. The needs never cease...more housing, more electricity, more plastics, more electronics, more chemicals. The goal is always to produce more. *More* always means more pollution, but the pollution is always someone else's problem.

"If the government tries to step in and reduce the pollution, the lawmakers are perceived to be a problem for production, not the solution to pollution. If a lawmaker persists in hindering production, the polluters will make sure that he or she is no longer a lawmaker. Production is the goal because production produces wealth.

"Corruption of political leaders becomes the means of control. Political contributions, lobbyists, fear tactics, bribery, and favors...all are methods used to keep increasing production and the wealth that results from it. The polluter is blind to the effects of his power, unable to recognize that the pollution really exists.

"Those serving under the leadership of the polluter are also forced into denial, denial that the pollution is real. If they do not submit, they will not be deemed a team player. To be loyal is to be in denial. Do not forget...from childhood, humans are taught to be obedient to authority, to think that authority is always right. Thus, pollution is not a problem. If production is to increase so that the polluter's power and wealth can increase, there is no time to think about the consequences of pollution. Time is of the essence and time is money. Once the cycle has started, anything can be rationalized. Even though millions of different species, including humans themselves, are being killed, the polluters still insist they have to pollute because the consumers demand more. Conspicuous consumption becomes the fuel that drives the fire."

Justice held up her wing to pause Solomon. "How do you think the humans are doing as far as taking care of the other species on earth?"

Solomon showed no hesitation in his response. "Their track record is not good at all. About 100,000,000 animals are used in testing laboratories. Chemicals are forced into them, causing them excruciating pain. The cruelty boggles the mind. Most of the testing is done in the cosmetic industry. Then, there are the humans who crave pure blood-lust, forcing dogs, cocks, and stallions to fight to the death. Seals are clubbed to death. Gorillas, chimpanzees, tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, whales, and even sharks are slaughtered. Domestic animals...humans call them pets...are starved, kicked, poisoned, and burned. Over 16,000 species are virtually extinct and many others may not survive. In the last 500 years, over 800 species have become extinct, including the black rhino, Caribbean monk seal, Canadian oystercatcher, and ivory-billed woodpecker.

"Meat producers keep sows in gestation crates barely big enough for the sow's body; she can't even turn around. In the poultry industry, 20,000 chickens are put into one shed with less than one square foot per chicken. Almost 99% of the farm animals in the United States are raised on factory farms and confined to spaces so small the animals can barely move. Waste piles up, creating unsanitary conditions. Producers provide no veterinary care for many of these creatures, and appalling suffering is inflicted when surgical mutilations are done without any anesthetics. The bloody screams of these creatures offer them no reprieve from their tormentors."

Justice broke in. "This all sounds deplorable. Why do you think humans, who were commanded by their Creator to care for the other species on Earth, are treating their fellow creatures so badly?"

Sly jumped to his feet. "I've heard enough. This question is improper. No Creator ever said anything about taking care of a pig. Pigs are bacon; pigs are pork chops and that's that!"

Judge Sophia addressed Sly. "You may ask the witness about this when you cross-examine, but you are now overruled. Please take your seat."

Solomon began to answer Justice's question. "Humans have taken all moral evaluation out of their decision-making. They take cruelty to the next step because they are never held accountable or punished for their careless and malicious deeds. Their only value judgment is to not get caught. Many humans would be horrified if they really knew about these travesties, and they would stop buying the products. A huge drop in sales would force the testing labs and factory farms to stop or at least to implement much more humane practices."

Justice asked, "How should humans go about changing their ways? What is the answer?"

Solomon's answer was simple. "They should pray. They should pray from Psalms, 7:9, 'Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; their minds and hearts are searched by the righteous God.' Humans should pray unceasingly that they awake in the morning in possession of clear minds full of understanding, tolerance, and compassion for their fellow man and all of the Creator's creatures, for certainly their thinking is awry at present and contrary to the Creator's."

Justice looked at Solomon. "What wisdom you have! What a gift the Creator has bestowed upon you! The knowledge you have given us in this courtroom is invaluable. I know you have much more wisdom you could offer but let me end my questioning so that Attorney Neocon can ask his questions."

Chapter 18

As soon as Justice reached her seat, Sly Neocon shot out of his to begin his cross-examination of Solomon. Sly, without acknowledging Judge Sophia or the jury, demanded of Solomon, "You think because you're an owl that you're superior to man, don't you?"

Solomon calmly responded, "I do not feel superior to anyone. I am what the Creator made me."

"How do you know who your Creator is?" asked Sly. "Maybe a man made you?"

"I innately know my Creator created me, and a human has never created an owl. That would far surpass any knowledge or power granted to humans by the Creator. An original creation is beyond the power of human beings. They merely discover attributes in nature that were put there by our Creator."

Sly, losing his composure, raised his voice an octave. "Humans have millions of patents for their creations. These patents certify humans are creators."

"If that was a question," said Solomon, "the only patent that should be given for creation is to the Creator who created all. Just because a human takes some plants or herbs and mixes them together to make a medicine does not make him a creator. The one Creator knew that combination would make that medicine from the beginning when the earth was created. For instance, man did not invent electricity; he discovered electricity because it was always there. The same is true of nuclear fission, sound waves, vaccines, the steam engine, the combustion engine, and the secret of flight. The list is endless. Man discovers what has always existed from the founding of the universe, but he is not the creator."

Sly paced the courtroom floor, obviously angry and unnerved by Solomon's answer. "Well, I don't see that you creatures have *discovered* much."

"Not true," replied Solomon. "We have made trillions of discoveries that allow us to adjust to our environment. Honeybees make honey, tiny hummingbirds store enough food to fly over an ocean, and the polar bear has a layer of blubber, allowing it to survive the bitter cold, as well as white fur to camouflage and protect it. I could go on and on. The creatures of the earth are constantly changing and discovering new ways to adapt to their environment."

Sly laughed, "It is still a dead bear when I shoot it. So, you arrogant little owl, as far as you are concerned, humans don't create anything. I guess we don't even need a patent office then."

Solomon replied, "That is correct on both accounts. God is the Creator. The concept of a patent, in terms of man being a creator, is blasphemy to the true Creator. Humans would be better served to honor the Creator for creation. But, if you are referring to humans getting fairly compensated for their discoveries, that is justified; they should be rewarded for using their time to discover the Creator's magnificent creations. The ant that discovers the bread crumb eats and other ants eat also. The ant should then justifiably expect that when another ant--one he shared the bread crumb with--finds a sugar cube, he will be eating sugar." Solomon continued, "We must be careful to discern what a true discovery is. For instance, if a squirrel eats an acorn and finds it nutritious, that

squirrel does not have the right to say all other squirrels owe him from now on because he discovered acorns are good to eat. Many other squirrels may have had the same experience previously or simultaneously or afterwards. Acorns are a gift from the Creator."

Sly continued to pace back and forth in the courtroom and barked back at Solomon, "You're into this Creator thing, aren't you?"

"It is wise, just, and prudent," cautioned Solomon, "that we do not let our egos overtake us so that we believe we are more intelligent than our Creator."

Sly stopped pacing and faced Solomon. "I got a question for you, you smart little owl. What are you doing taking up for a bunch of vultures? Don't like your own kind or what?"

Solomon asked, "Why do you have hostility toward vultures? I find this peculiar. If it weren't for vultures and other birds cleaning up the earth, the human race would be overrun with diseases. Vultures actually allow humans to survive by cleansing the earth, as the Creator meant for them to do. In regards to my defending vultures, they are creatures of the Creator. Humans are the only creatures that have prejudices, not only against other species but also against their own species. You readily adopt behavior that displays racism, sexism, and brutalism. To an owl, however, a bear is a bear, a deer is a deer, and a vulture is a vulture. All are creations of the Creator. I do not look at another owl of a different color and say, 'That owl is bad.' I only see an owl, a creation of the Creator.

"The hatred humans have for other humans and other species is peculiar only to man and is not natural to the Creator's law of nature. I have observed this hatred carefully. Hatred is what wars are made of. Hatred is always preceded by greed. When hatred and greed come together, humans are sure to have another war...."

Sly quickly interrupted Solomon. "What do you know about war?"

Solomon answered, "I know humans have been at war with one another since the beginning of time. Cain killed Abel, and when the Creator asked Cain where his brother was, Cain evaded the question by asking, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' That question has haunted man. Every time there is another war, man answers the question Cain was asked eons ago. He is not his brother's keeper. War has become a way of life for humans. Human wars are like King Sisyphus' boulder. He rolled the boulder up the steep hill, causing himself much pain and agony, but he accomplished nothing because in the morning King Sisyphus was forced to start all over again."

Sly paced the width of the courtroom floor furiously, scratching his bald head and muttering, "Who is King Sisyphus?" Finally he advanced toward Solomon and stopped only when he was within inches of Solomon's face. "War. You don't know a damn thing about war! Stop talking about war or I'll blow your damn head off with my shotgun, you stupid little owl."

Judge Sophia instantly reprimanded Sly. "I will have you removed from the courtroom if I hear anymore malicious talk! Do you understand me, Mr. Neocon?"

Sly looked up at Judge Sophia and again at Solomon and contemptuously replied, "Yes, Your Honor."

Justice had prepared Solomon well. He did not cower before Sly nor was he intimidated by Sly's bullying. Instead, Solomon gave Sly an unfaltering, piercing gaze as only an owl can. Solomon gratefully realized he had accomplished his mission of completely unnerving Sly.

Sly screamed, "You don't look scared, but you should. I am a powerful man. I could easily kill you."

Judge Sophia intervened again. "This is your last warning, Mr. Neocon!"

Solomon answered Sly's question calmly, "I am quite sure that you are a dangerous man, Mr. Neocon, but you do not have a reputation for being a good marksman, and I have an excellent reputation as a flier. And, to die in the process of exposing your evil ways would be to live forever."

Sly, his face crimson with rage, shouted, "I have had enough of this witness. He is too dumb to even fear me."

Immediately Judge Sophia pounded her gavel and exclaimed, "Enough! Remove Mr. Neocon from the courtroom until he can gain control." Two angels instantly appeared, one on each side of Sly, and escorted him from the courtroom. Then, Judge Sophia tapped her gavel and spoke, "This Court is adjourned for the day. We will reconvene at promptly at ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

Chapter 19

The next morning Judge Sophia ordered Sly Neocon to call his witness. Sly called George, the warmonger, who sauntered to the witness box and took his seat. His demeanor was one of boredom and inconvenience, and in his hands he held a bundle of papers.

Sly said, "Good morning, sir; it is an honor for me to have such a distinguished man as you as my witness. Let me ask my first question. To the best of your knowledge, are humans in charge of the earth?"

George scowled, annoyed that he should be asked such a question. "Of course, we are. We can do whatever we want, anytime we want. All other creatures on Earth are beneath us and are here purely for our pleasure. We have the right to build and destroy as we please with no interference from any other creature. It has been that way since the beginning." George smirked, delighted with his own answer.

Sly asked another question. "Tell me about the advancements man has made."

George was more at ease now and even grinned. "Like my pickup truck? Now that's a truck. Over four hundred horse power." He looked toward the prosecution's table, laughed, and sneeringly commented, "I guess the other side probably doesn't like me using the words *horse power*. Too bad. It's got twenty-two inch aluminum wheels, driveline traction control, six-speed transmission, and an interior that a person would kill for. You start up that rig and you're sucking up some gas. I paid almost a hundred grand for that truck. It's a marvel; it's high technology. Technology is the only thing that makes the world worth living in. I'd say the human race is doing just fine."

Sly wanted to move on and asked, "What else has mankind done?"

George smiled again, "Well, we got those big screen televisions...got them all over the house...big house...big pickup truck...big screen TV...and a gun rack full of guns. What else could a man need?"

As George spoke, Justice watched his gestures and facial expressions carefully. Suddenly Justice caught movement out of the corner of her eye. Sly was surreptitiously pointing to the papers George held in his hands.

As soon as George paused for a second, Sly said, "George, can you give us a list of the inventions man has made?"

George ignored the papers in his hand. "Sure...the printing press, electricity, musket, turbine engine, steam engine, automobile, windmills, barb wire, Gatling gun—now you can do some killing with one of those things—radio, stove, crossbow—that's got a lot of power to kill something—refrigerator, air conditioning, dynamite—you can do a whole lot of damage with that stuff, too...."

As George prattled on, Justice could see Sly pointing down, trying to tell George to follow the script on the paper, but it was useless. George continued with his own list, "...pesticides, gun powder—good stuff there—machine gun—now there's a killing machine—telescope, repeating rifle—now I got some of those—electric dryer...."

Sly jumped in with another question. "Would you say the list is endless?"

"Oh sure," said George, "goes on forever. Boy, do we have technology!"

Sly inquired, "Can you tell us about how humans fly? I bet Miss Eagle over there would appreciate your teaching her a thing or two about flying."

George chuckled, "I might be able to teach her something all right. We got an aircraft we call the F-117. Now that's a piece of machinery! Over six hundred miles an hour...has anti-radar missiles...electro-optical guided bombs...laser-guided bombs...it can even drop a nuclear bomb. Talk about a killing machine! I get excited just thinking about it. And, we got an F-15. That plane will go more than 1,600 miles an hour. It's got a six-barrel cannon and a sidewinder air-to-air missile. It can hold 23,000 pounds of bombs, and one of those can carry rockets just in case you need them. You never know...better safe than sorry, I say. But, in fact, we don't even need a plane to do some killing. We can kill from far away just using a missile. We have all kinds of marvels in technology. Why we can kill someone 1,500 miles away with a 1,000 pound warhead.

"Then we got nuclear bombs. We can take out a large city with one of those. Hell, we can annihilate a whole country...as long as it's not too big, with one of those. You hold the button to one of those in your hand and you know you have power...so much power...gives you brain freeze...you just want to use it to see what it'll do. Humans are the potentates of Earth. We control the world. Technology is our god...there is no god greater than our bombs. We hold every man, woman, and child's life in our grasp. We decide who will live and who will die. If people rise up to depose us, they will die, and we will laugh because we will have killed them with the weapons their own tax dollars paid for, George said smugly.

"Lobbies are powerful armies, the most powerful on earth. Without lobbies, you don't have armies. The common people are just fools. Why, my friends and I could order our lobbies to pay politicians to raise property taxes till no one could afford to pay anymore. We could have the government confiscate all the houses, and then we could buy the houses cheap on the courthouse steps. Our lobbies would make sure no one else would bid against us. After that, we could send the same lobbies in to have the politicians lower the taxes to nothing and then sell the houses back to the same fools. We could even create a government mortgage plan to finance the property for the fools. Why, we could even pay for the program with a new tax and take the money right out of their paychecks. The fools couldn't do a thing about any of it.

"Some people say the common voters would elect a totally new government. Won't happen. And, I'll tell you why. I've got a whole gang of political operatives. A person could love his mother and worship the ground she walks on, but by the time my political operatives got done running nasty, negative ads about her on the media, her own children wouldn't vote for her. She might be a saint, but I could make her look like the devil. I don't care if a person is a top-notch general, a war hero, a great teacher, an unselfish philanthropist, or a pious minister. Doesn't matter who they are. My gang can make them appear despicable, uncaring, and egotistical. Now that's power!

"Political operatives...that's just a fancy name for a bunch of lying psycho that will do anything to get close to powerful people like me. They're not people you'd want to have a cozy dinner with, but they're good to have when you want to make someone look dirty or need something underhanded

done. It sort of reminds me of the old days. No one wanted to have dinner with the slave trader, but the slave master didn't kick him off the plantation either.

"Thank you, George," said Sly. "I have no further questions."

Judge Sophia said, "We will adjourn till after lunch. When we return, Miss Justice will cross-examine Mr. George."

Chapter 20

When Court was back in session. Justice approached the witness stand and politely inquired, "How are you doing today, George?"

"I'm fine, just ready to get out of here."

"Well, I just have a few questions for you. I learned so much about technology today. I wonder if you could enlighten me a little more. How successful has technology been in recent wars? Would you know that?"

George was quick to answer. "Sure. In this last war we killed over 460,000 enemies, destroyed thousands of buildings, and tore up that nation's infrastructure. Unbelievable success. Something to be proud of."

Justice replied, "Yes, I'm sure you are proud. Of the 460,000 that were killed, do you know how many were men, how many were women, and how many were children?"

"I have no idea," said George. "What does it matter? They got in the way of what we were doing."

"One more question, George," said Justice. "In regards to this last war, how many creatures were killed? Birds, mammals, reptiles, bugs?"

George laughed. "You are surely joking! We don't count such things. You're lucky I know how many soldiers were killed. We seldom even count the human civilians who get killed. Besides, they're dead. Dead is dead. What does it matter?"

Justice asked her next question. "When do you think war will come to an end, George?"

"Now that's difficult to estimate. I suppose when the potentates have complete control of the world. Maybe when we get the technology that will allow us to kill any person we want, at any time we want...maybe when we completely dominate and everyone else lives in absolute fear of us...then there will be no more need for war. We will control death so there will be no need for the confusion of war...no need to deceive the masses. If you disagree with us, you die. If you agree with us, you live. For us who are in control, the choice an individual makes is of no consequence. Yes...then you'll have a world without war, and the time might be sooner than you think."

Justice asked her next question, "Doesn't the Bible say to fear is evil?"

"The Bible says a lot of things," replied George. "The Bible is all about how you interpret it. In politics you interpret it how you want. Most people really don't know whether you're lying or telling the truth, so it doesn't matter. You get some preacher to go along with you and affirm the veracity of whatever you say, and the common people will believe because they're gullible. You see, most people are good or want to be so they won't disagree with a preacher. Yes, the Bible says lots of things. What the Bible says to me is whatever is expedient for me to stay in power. Men have been controlling the foolish masses with one doctrine or another since the beginning of time."

Justice interrupted, "But what if the Bible really is the truth? Then what?"

"Well," said George, "then I suspect those who believe will win."

"Will they inherit the earth?" asked Justice.

"Yes...maybe," replied George, "but don't count on it. For years preachers have been telling me don't do this and don't do that, forgive this person, help the poor, the Bible says this, the Bible says that, and on and on. Preachers are fatuous, feeble-minded imbeciles. You always have to explain to them what their job is."

Justice asked, "And, what is their job?"

George responded, "To scare the masses into voting for the potentates, of course. You talk to these preachers, make a few promises, pat them on the back, and send them on their way. But, never give them much of anything because they'll only want more. Oh, there are a few preachers out there who won't come near me. They're a bunch of do-gooders...really, just a bunch of losers. I don't like any of them. They give me the creeps. I talk directly to God...don't need any preacher. God always wants what I want."

Justice then said, "I did not know our Creator had wants."

"Sure," said George, "sure He does...I tell Him what He wants and then He wants it. It's that simple."

"Wow, very enlightening," replied Justice. She couldn't help but say it with a hint of sarcasm, which was totally lost on George. "Please tell us how your potentates hold on to their power."

Before George could answer, Sly jumped from his seat. "I object! I object! These birds know nothing about the governance of humans. I am one of the most powerful attorneys on earth, and I will not allow these questions to be asked of my witness."

Judge Sophia peered down at Sly. "Your objection is overruled. You will show respect for this Court or you will be removed." Instantly two angels appeared, one on each side of the Judge. "Take your seat, Mr. Neocon."

Sly sneered at both angels and reluctantly took his seat.

Judge Sophia looked at the witness. "Please answer the question."

When George began to speak, he leaned forward as if what he was about to say was profound. "We potentates hold on to power because many years ago our lobbyists had incorporation laws passed to eliminate the liability of our ventures. Then our lobbyists got laws passed so we could monopolize the market and end free enterprise. There's really no competition so we make lots and lots of money. A small amount of that money is used to buy politicians. Doesn't take much...you can buy them cheap."

Justice took a step closer to the witness stand. "It would seem as if that might be unfair and, of course, unethical."

George just shrugged. "That's the way it is."

Justice continued with another question. "What about the Constitution of your country? Is it not an important document?"

George looked at Justice with complete disdain. Justice rephrased her question when George did not respond. "Well, how do you feel about the Constitution that your forefathers wrote?"

A few seconds passed and George replied haughtily, "We have the Constitution so that people will believe in and obey laws. We use the judges to change it at our will. In the end there is one law only, just one law." George's voice rose louder and louder. "One law. Do you hear me, you ignorant eagle?"

Judge Sophia immediately cautioned George, "You need to control yourself, Mr. George, and answer in a civil manner."

Justice did not recoil from George's tirade and calmly asked, "What law?"

"The law of greed," retorted George. "Greed is good."

Justice asked, "Why is greed good, George?"

George's hands flew above his head; he was clearly exasperated with Justice. "Because it is. Greed is good and absolute greed is the best. There is no need for debate. Pure, unadulterated greed is always the answer."

"Why do you love greed so much, George?"

George smirked, "You, Miss Eagle, have been talking about war, justice, ethics, and morals...yacking on and on. It all has one answer to me and my potentates: if we can't make money off it, we don't give a damn. If we can make money, then it's good. If we, the potentates, say it's right, it's right. Your Creator created life and it dies. We, the potentates, created life...the corporation...and that life never dies. We breathe the breath of greed into the corporation, and it's good for eternity. Your Creator breathes life into you and in a few years you're dead. We have trumped your Creator!"

There were many astonished gasps in the courtroom. Judge Sophia pounded her gavel and warned, "There will be order. If you cannot be silent, you will be removed from the courtroom."

Justice then asked, "George, does this mean man is a greater creator than the Creator?"

George dodged the question. "Your Creator did not create corporations, the potentates did. Our corporations live forever but your Creator's creations die daily."

Justice then asked, "Wasn't there a time in history when there were no corporations?"

George answered, his voice confident, "Of course, there was. We had a great system of nobility, but when the masses revolted and that system ended, the potentates had to find another way to control the common people. So, we potentates had our lobbyists do whatever it took to get state legislatures to pass incorporation laws. This was extremely difficult to do because we had to convince the politicians in the legislatures that incorporation was for the common good. We finally succeeded, when the majority of the nation was still rural, by telling the politicians that the incorporation laws would help farmers by building bridges and railroads so that they could get their crops to market more cheaply and more easily. Then we kept expanding the use of corporate law till we were able to take over all the markets. Today nothing happens without us, the potentates, getting paid. Getting these corporate laws passed was not an easy task. We had to pay legislators a lot of money to vote with us."

Justice moved slightly forward toward George and said, "George, this is all very interesting. I bet most people do not even know that all of this transpired."

George replied, "I suspect they don't, but the common people don't need to know it either."

Justice asked, "Why did the potentates go to all the trouble of creating corporations?"

"We had to create corporations because free enterprise had gone mad. Anyone, at any time, could enter the market place and buy and sell. The freedom of enterprise was being used by common people to gain control over their own lives, and the potentates were being excluded...we had to do something. The situation was intolerable for the ruling class. Once we had the incorporation laws in

place, we sent our lobbyists to strengthen our position at the state and federal levels. We gained more and more power. We have complete control over all markets now.

"Recently we even rigged the patent system so all inventors have to come through us. For instance, our corporations take out patents on every possible combination of a drug so if a use is ever discovered, the corporation gets the reward for the discovery. Miss Eagle, it's simple...those that control the dollar, control the world. The power the people once had is now controlled by corporations, and the corporations are controlled by us, the potentates. Once we had absolute control, the system was reduced down to one law—greed. And, greed is good," concluded George with a smug look and proud tone.

"But, George," asked Justice, "doesn't greed have a down side? Doesn't it fail sometimes?" George shook his head, "No down side. No failure. I am absolutely convinced that greed is the answer. Greed is good. Greed is our savior."

Justice took a quick step back and retorted, "I thought Jesus was our Savior."

Sly jumped to his feet. "I object! There was no question."

Judge Sophia looked down at Justice and said, "Make sure you ask a question, Miss Justice."

Justice said, "I apologize, Your Honor. I will rephrase it."

During this questioning, David couldn't help but smile at Solomon, who had rolled his eyes several times at George's answers. David whispered to Melissa, "George is a lunatic." She nodded in the affirmative.

Justice tipped her head as if uncertain and questioned, "George, how do you think greed works for the humans who suffer in poverty?"

"Well," laughed George, "we had the Supreme Court do away with usury laws? That made it easier for poor people to get loans. Gave them a little help so they could have some money."

"Will that help to keep the poor from becoming destitute and homeless?" asked Justice.

"Until payday," responded George pompously. "Then they have to pay back the money, with interest, lots of interest."

"But, George, what if a person can't pay back the loan?"

George was obviously annoyed by the question. "We ruin them. Why do you keep asking about poor people and the homeless? To be honest, I avoid thinking about them. If I see one when I'm driving down the road, I say to myself, 'What a bum! Probably a drug addict or a drunk.'"

"So if a person consumes alcohol or has become addicted to drugs, he deserves to be homeless, to go hungry, or to freeze to death?" asked Justice.

"I drink alcohol," countered George. "The dying part comes from being poor. That's the crime."

"So these people die because they are poor?" inquired Justice.

A hint of anger entered George's voice. "I have no idea what they do. My rule is never talk to a homeless person. Talking to them will just get you sucked into their misery. Who in the world would want to hear about someone else's tribulations? The best homeless person is an invisible one. Why do you think we make laws to keep them out of sight? People like me shouldn't have to endure the annoyance of looking at such losers. Out of sight is out of mind. Everyone's happy."

"How do you think the Creator feels about the homeless?" asked Justice.

George shook his head in disgust. "He'll probably punish them for dying without paying for their funeral expenses. The rest of us get stuck paying for those losers to get buried. That's not fair, not right at all. We give those poor people all kinds of menial jobs to give them money. The least they could do is bury themselves."

Justice stood silently and waited for everyone in the courtroom to stop murmuring about George's harsh words. Judge Sophia again pounded her gavel and asked for silence in the courtroom.

When Justice continued, she calmly said, "George, you have answered a lot of tough questions with extreme forthrightness. Does all of this responsibility of being a leader of the potentates cause you a lot of stress?"

George shrugged. "I'm all right."

Justice continued, "Is it stressful all of the time or just in court today?"

George snapped back, "Most of the time life is great for me. Plenty of food. Plenty to drink. I usually have the best of everything every day. I quite enjoy myself."

"That's nice," said Justice. "It's not so much fun to be here in this Court though, is it? Well, I won't be much longer."

"Good," responded George. "I don't care for courtrooms. I try to stay away from them."

Chapter 21

Justice began to walk away from the witness stand as if she had concluded her questioning but abruptly pivoted and said, "George, I have one more question. We are concerned about the future and what is going to happen. Maybe you can tell us about a project that you are working on that will make the world a better place in which to live."

Sly jumped to his feet. "I object, your Honor. The future has no bearing on the past. What the human race has done in the past does not indicate in any way what humans will do in the future."

"Overruled," stated Judge Sophia. "If George has a plan, the Court would like to hear about it."

Sly, frustrated, sat back down, but Justice could hear him mumble, "Damn this Court."

Justice moved back toward George. "George, please tell us about your plan. You have been so helpful in explaining how the world operates; I'm quite sure you can teach us more."

Justice's words inflated George's ego. He grinned, happy that Justice had recognized how intelligent and important he was. "Well, I do have this one project going with a potentate friend of mine named Samuel Wally. He's really smart and travels all over the world. I call him Big Wally because he's a giant. Kids usually call him Big Dude." George chuckled as he said Big Dude, amused by his own joke. "Well, Wally and I are working on a plan to help the citizens to vote. This may be hard for you to understand, Miss Eagle, a little above your intellectual level, but listen carefully and you might get it." George looked over at Solomon and pointed at him. "That wise old owl, he'll get it," George grinned and laughed.

"When a corporation has its annual meeting, most of the shareholders don't show up, so the shareholders that don't show up sign their votes over to management authorizing management to vote for them. This is called a proxy vote. Well, Big Wally and I are working on a system that will allow proxy voting to be done in a general election when we vote for our country's leaders. It would work like this: someone goes to work for a corporation. As part of the employment agreement, the person would turn his civic vote over to the corporation. Then, every time there is an election—from school board to president of the country—the corporation would vote that person's vote.

"The proxy system will be good for people. It will save them time because they won't have to stand in line to cast their votes. This makes perfect sense because once people go to work for a corporation, their interests become exactly the same as the corporation's. And, when people retire, out of loyalty to the corporation for giving them a job, they would continue to let the corporation cast their votes. They'd never have to be bothered with voting again.

"Now, listen to this...Big Wally was talking to some of our friends, and they came up with an ingenious idea to help take care of the poor. You'll like this, Miss Eagle. Before an election, we'll register the poor people and trade each one a coupon for a meal at a fast food place for his or her proxy vote. There are poor people and homeless people everywhere...every city...every town...even in rural areas, all looking for a meal. This will give them something to eat. The restaurant will be able to make money by turning the coupon in for cash, and we'll have the proxy vote to control the election. Everybody wins.

"Big Wally and I are talking about endless possibilities with this proxy vote idea. There could even be a website set up that says, 'If you're in favor of the Second Amendment, just turn your vote over in proxy, and we'll take care of everything for you.' We could have a separate website for any issue we want. Why, we could even have a website where religious people could give us their proxy vote, and we'd take care of those hard moral issues for them...they never have to think about them again." George smiled broadly. "Proxy voting. It's simple...the way of the future. No more tedious hours spent running campaigns and spending billions of dollars to get potentates' candidates elected. With proxy voting the election would be over before it even got started because all the votes would be under our control.

"When we get the proxy vote system in place, we potentates will have absolute control. We can do what we want. If we want to start a war, subsidize a business, or use a river to get rid of toxic waste, we'll just do it. Eminent domain will be absolute...no more property owners getting in our way...the possibilities are endless. The leaders of the corporations that hold the proxies can cut whatever deals they want. Then we'll have the politicians we control ratify the decisions. Proxy voting...why, it's the perfect democracy. Everyone still has a vote, but they let those that have the knowledge and the know-how vote for them.

George grinned with undisguised pride. "The beauty of proxy voting is that corporations will never be held responsible for anything. A corporation can go into an area, take property by eminent domain, set up operations, make a ton of money, and then just pull out when it wants and leave the mess behind for someone else to clean up."

"Wow!" exclaimed Justice. "You really like this idea, don't you, George?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Justice, I do. No more fighting with some quack at the Justice Department about monopolies, oligopolies, and interlocking directories. We will merge small corporations in the same field until there is only one mighty corporation that controls the entire market. There will be only one electric company, one gas company, one oil company, one software company, and yes, even one toy company. Consolidate and raise the profits for the potentates! Now that makes sense. No more talking about the effects on the economy when corporate boards have interlocking directors.

"The way the Justice Department talks about competition you'd think it was a virtue. Every board member of every corporation should be acting on behalf of all corporations...in total sink with each other. What does the Justice Department want? Us potentates to be at war with each other? It only makes sense that the oil corporation should know when the natural gas corporation is going to raise its prices. How else would the oil corporation know that it's time to raise its oil prices?

"What's the Justice Department looking for? A price war? Look, the general public thinks that the prices of goods are arrived at by competition in the market place. That's just how ignorant those fools are. Prices are determined by elasticity of demand so that we potentates can maximize profits. We create artificial scarcity to drive prices higher. When we control the market, we get the most we can get from the greatest number of consumers. The price becomes how much we can manipulate consumers to pay. Many consumers believe scarcity determines corporate prices...no truth to that. Scarcity is an illusion we potentates create. For instance, with commodities, we send speculators in to artificially bid up the price.

"One of the problems with this world is there's too much of everything. Poverty and the fear of poverty help to sustain value because consumers feel better when they can buy goods others can't. Elasticity of demand pricing sets one consumer at war with another under the false belief of scarcity. The sellers—that's the potentates who control the markets—are rewarded with unnatural profits." George leaned forward as if he was going to reveal some secret knowledge. "Have you ever heard the expression *the rich get richer and the poor get poorer*? Elasticity of demand pricing is the engine that drives that miracle. The beauty of it is that it works with any goods or service, like commodities, banking, or manufacturing, both wholesale and retail."

Justice stood directly in front of the witness box. "George, you really do have some plans for the future, don't you? Do you think you will be successful?"

George beamed and Justice moved back a couple of steps so that all the jurors could see George. "Absolutely, no doubt about it," bragged George. "Yes, we will succeed. Here's a little secret...in recent years we potentates have taken control of the Supreme Court. We already had them rule that corporations have the same rights as humans. Now, we're working on moving them toward a Bill of Rights for Corporations that will supersede individual human rights. This will be good for people because they will no longer feel a need to oppose our interests."

"The masses will be happier when they learn to conform to our will. Our enterprises will control all of the people, all of the time. When this happens, the natural order of class society will be firmly in place," said George.

Justice took a step forward. "You're excited about proxy voting and creating a class society, aren't you, George?"

George was still smiling, quite content with himself. "Yes, yes, I do get excited. Proxy voting is the future. It will give us potentates the final solution to our quest for total control, but there are some problems...like this new Pope. He's talking against us and that's got to be stopped. I just want this Court to know it won't need to worry about any revolution by any human or animal when we potentates have complete power. We'll keep everything under control. This Court won't have anything to be concerned with. Those in the masses who oppose their destiny will be...how should I put this...persuaded forcefully if need be...to do as we say. We know how to handle such matters. This Court needs to know we will all coexist peacefully once all living species submit to the potentates' will. There will be no need for this Court to interfere in the potentates' agenda."

Justice softly asked, "Do you think the potentates' agenda is the same as the Creator's agenda?"

George chuckled, "Yes, of course, our agendas are the same. The Creator is in compliance with whatever our agenda is because He is well aware of the hardships we potentates face ruling the Earth."

"Thank you for answering my questions, George, with such enthusiasm and in such detail. I have no further questions for the witness, Your Honor," said Justice. George, the warmonger, smiled as he left the witness box, strutted back to the defendant's table, and plopped himself into the seat next to Sly Neocon.

Chapter 22

After George was seated, Judge Sophia announced, "I have decided that this Court will hear a brief statement from the plaintiffs. Neither the prosecution nor the defense will be able to ask any questions. The Court will hear from David first."

Sly jumped to his feet and objected, "You're just the Judge! You can't add another witness. This is not right."

Judge Sophia looked down at Sly. "Again, Mr. Neocon, if you had bothered to read the rules of this Court, you would know that the rules clearly state that the judge can call whomever he or she wants to give testimony. You signed a document stating that you received the rules governing the procedures in this Courtroom. Do you need a copy of that document, Mr. Neocon?"

Sly looked up at Judge Sophia. He had clearly not read the rules, and his countenance mirrored his disdain for her and the proceedings. "No, Your Honor."

Judge Sophia continued, "Be careful, Mr. Neocon, lest I call you to the witness stand, for I know you have dark secrets this Court and the entire world would be horrified to know about." Sly quickly retreated to his seat.

David rose and went to the witness stand. "Your Honor," said Justice, "I present to you David."

"David," said Judge Sophia, "please explain why you decided that the human race needed to be taken before the Court on Mount High."

David responded in a clear, controlled voice, "I learned about the Court on Mount High from my grandfather. He, as well as other members of my tribe, has been in despair about the humans' increased recklessness for a long time. We have seen the abusive and violent behavior of humans toward other creatures that inhabit the earth. Animals have been deliberately maimed or killed; several species have become extinct and others face extinction. We have also seen the unprecedented misuse of the environment by humans because of their technology and their destructive weapons of war.

"After my son's death, I was angry and wanted revenge, but after much prayer and meditation, I was given the gift of forgiveness and a vision to take action...that is, to bring the human race before the Court on Mount High, to make them aware of and accountable for the devastation they cause. I found hope in my prayer, and my vision gave me the faith to go forward. I have embraced this mission since that day. I have traveled thousands of miles on this journey and communed with thousands of the Creator's creatures. I have accomplished what most have said was impossible, for with the assistance of Justice, Solomon, my mate, and many, many others, we are here...the human race has been brought before the Court on Mount High.

"Each day of my journey I found a new reason to press on. The mission started with the death of my son, but I saw the suffering of so many species, the contamination and destruction of the earth's ecosystem, and ravage of the beauty of Earth, which our Creator gave to us to enjoy. I am convinced that if man does not evolve into a better creature, he will destroy the entire planet. On my journey I

saw much beauty and was privileged to gain much knowledge, but I am deeply troubled that the next generation will not have that opportunity."

"Thank you, David," said Judge Sophia. "You may return to your seat. The Court will now hear from Melissa."

When Melissa heard her name called, she confidently looked up at Judge Sophia and the jury. Justice nodded and walked her to the stand. "Your Honor," said Justice, "I present Melissa."

Judge Sophia looked down at Melissa and asked, "Please tell the Court what initiated David and you to make this complaint and bring your suit to this Court?"

Melissa took a deep breath. "It began with the death of our son. We were all returning from a wonderful trip to the waterfalls. We had stopped to feed on a deer that had been killed by an automobile. We were a safe distance from the side of the road, at least seven feet. Suddenly a truck with big tires drove off the road and headed toward us. David and I were able to get out of the way in time, but our son was killed. It was not an accident. The human in the truck tried to kill us deliberately." Melissa's voice trembled as she added, "He just laughed when he saw that his tires had crushed our son. No creature on earth has ever come up with a word that fully describes the loss a father or mother suffers when they lose a child, for such an event defies the natural order that the Creator established.

"My mate, David, while sitting in the Tree of Life grieving the loss of our son, had a revelation to engender a mission to inspire human spirituality on Earth. The human race's unrepentant, nefarious behavior compelled him to petition the Court on Mount High to hear this case. It started as David's mission but it became mine, too. I have championed his mission, fully aware of the danger it could bring to us and anyone who dared to assist us. Our mission will have been worth the risk if no other species become extinct and the earth itself will not become totally uninhabitable. Many have endured much hardship and sacrifice to accomplish this mission so that the creatures that inhabit the earth, including humans themselves, might be saved.

"I look to the future. I have faith that this trial on Mount High will result in a revival for the earth, and once again it will become what the Creator intended—a beautiful and bountiful paradise. I have traveled far with David, and many have sacrificed their lives so that we could be here. Now, only one question still haunts us. It is a question that vultures have been asking for almost two thousand years. If I may, I will tell a brief story that will explain.

"Thousands of years ago, there was a family of vultures not so different from my own. Early in the morning they found food and were filled to their content. The father and mother decided to spend the rest of the day improving their child's flying skills. The parents took great pleasure instructing the child how to maneuver through the sky to catch the air currents and ride them with ease. When they were all tired, they landed on a wooden cross to rest. The mother was on one side of the patibulum, the father on the other, and the child perched on the top of the stipes. The men below were wrapping a cloth around the bloody corpse of a man they called Jesus, who had been recently crucified. The child looked down at his father and asked, 'Why did the humans crucify the man named Jesus?' Then the child asked his mother, 'Why do the humans hate Jesus?'

"Ever since that day, every time a vulture sees a human doing a malicious or destructive act, the same question is asked, 'Why do humans hate Jesus?' Can the members of the human race abandon their addiction to hate and find love? Is it still possible for them to bow down and worship their Creator? This is all we ask, for if the human race will submit themselves to the Creator, all will be right and there will be justice and goodwill on the earth again. And, most importantly, my son will not have died in vain."

"Thank you, Melissa. You may return to your seat," said Judge Sophia. "This Court will reconvene tomorrow morning at ten o'clock for closing statements." She tapped her gavel and Court was adjourned.

Chapter 23

Court was convened promptly at ten o'clock. "The Court will hear your closing statement, Miss Justice," said Judge Sophia.

Justice rose and addressed the courtroom. "We, the creatures of the earth, come before this Court under great stress and urgency. The earth is suffering catastrophic damage; species are being eradicated and the environment is being devastated.

"My clients, David and Melissa, have spoken about the wanton death of their son, an event multiplied every day, too many times to count. Our expert witness, Solomon, in his articulate and informative testimony, has clearly shown evidence that the human race is, with malice, destroying the planet Earth and the creatures that inhabit it, including themselves. Without relief more species will continue to be annihilated, and Earth's land, water, and air...essential to the humans' own survival... will continue to be polluted and destroyed. The mystery is why does the human race continue down this road of destruction? In my closing, I would like to explore seven possible reasons from the evidence that has been presented.

"First, humans are suffering from a severe case of narcissism. Humans have become so egotistic, so selfish that they are blind to the fact that the planet must be preserved for them to survive. The human race's egomania has destroyed their ability to act collectively. All human actions have been reduced to self-centered or egocentric behavior. Each individual, as well as each group, culture, and nation, believes he or she can outlast his or her neighbor in a war of survival. This behavior explains the barbaric wickedness of humans toward each other and the endless persecution of one group of humans by another. The simplest observation shows that humans are at war with one another on multifarious levels. Victory by one side does not end these conflicts. All victory has to offer is a delay till the next violent outbreak. The number of humans who seek accord and solidarity as a solution to violence has drastically diminished, and these peacemakers have suffered great opposition because of their beliefs.

"Next, we must consider whether or not the human race has lost its sanity. The definition of insanity is repeating an action that is known to have failed, over and over. The human race continuously repeats wars, terrorism, genocide, murder, torture, rape, slavery, and the impoverishment of millions upon millions of other humans. Humans see each act of violence as a reason to arm themselves to the maximum to prepare for the next act of violence. And, when a human dares to step forward to say give peace a chance, he or she is dismissed as a fool.

"It is no wonder that the creatures of the earth have asked if it is the intention of the human race to destroy the entire planet and then plead insanity to the Creator. The actions of the human race could make a convincing argument. Certainly if someone were on an ocean liner and used an explosive to blow a huge hole in the ship, leaving him or her with no means of escape, would that person not be considered a lunatic? The same nomenclature would be used for a person who would damage the airplane on which he or she was a passenger. Can the human race be sane when they are destroying the planet Earth, on which we are all passengers?

"Let us now consider the human race's addiction to greed. Most humans have an ever increasing desire for material possessions to satisfy a psychological euphoria, or greed. They are enslaved to owning and consuming more and more, wanting everything to be bigger and better. They are driven to gain ownership for the sake of ownership. Their addiction is as deadly for those around them as is that of a person who turns to illegal drugs. Consumption for consumption's sake affects us all and always leads to the destruction of the environment. Is greed the reason why the human race is blind to the destruction of their own planet?

"The fourth area I would like to explore is technology. Technology is glorified by the human race, but they give little consideration to the results. Humans always consider new technology an advancement and never consider the potential hazards that accompany that advancement. Humans seek new technology too often to produce abhorrent killing mechanisms for their wars. A bigger and better bomb is always on the agenda. Technology is seldom used to unify; instead, it is most often a tool of greed for an individual, a corporation, or a nation to seize power. Advancements in technology lead to a wider chasm between the haves and the have-nots, and this leads to isolation, inequality, depression, and poor social skills. Man uses technology in a spiritual vacuum.

"One bizarre case occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, involving a dispute between George Westinghouse and Thomas Edison over whether direct current or alternating current was better in producing electrical power. Edison tried to prove his point by having Professor Harold Brown conduct demonstrations as he toured many cities across the United States. During his demonstrations, Professor Brown executed numerous dogs, cats, cows, and horses to prove that alternating current was dangerous and should not be used. In an act of showmanship, Brown even electrocuted an orangutan. Then, a magnificent ten-foot tall, six-ton Asian elephant named Topsy was shamefully put to death. Topsy was forced into wooden sandals with copper electrodes, which were used to run six thousand volts of AC power into the helpless elephant, causing her blood to boil, her flesh to burn, and her eyes to melt.

"Man always has a choice in how he uses technology...for good or for evil. Jonas Salk chose not to patent the polio vaccine that he discovered. When he was asked why, he posed a simple question: 'Can you patent the sun?' By making the right choice, the altruistic choice, not one based on personal monetary greed, he saved untold numbers of humans the misery of suffering from polio or dying from the dreaded disease.

"Next, let us talk about a fifth reason--spirituality. The human race is so absorbed with their material life style that they no longer strive for a higher consciousness. A revival of their spiritual conscience would remind them that they need to transcend their egos and concentrate on enlightenment, community, and love. If humans could achieve this, they would live lives of faith, hope, and charity and discover the mystery and wonder of life, which the Creator has blessed them with.

"This brings us to the subject of empathy, which is imperative if the earth is to survive. Without empathy humans do not connect with the feelings of those around them, and there is no compassion for other humans or other creatures. Unfortunately, the human race has replaced empathy with fear. Instead of showing understanding for some other being's position, fear is invoked to manipulate individuals and even entire nations. Making others afraid is a violent act used to prevent fair

negotiations between parties. Over time fear leads to war. Empathy, however, brings about understanding, mutual concessions, reciprocal modifications of demands, and ultimately peace.

"Finally we come to the refusal to ask for forgiveness. The human race refuses to ask the Creator for forgiveness because to do so, humans would have to admit they are wrong. To apologize sincerely, humans would have to repent. But, humans are not willing to change so they continue their nefarious ways. As long as the human race refuses to acknowledge their heinous acts, there can be no justice on Earth. The human race needs to consider the words found in Hosea 10:12, 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Yahweh, until he comes and rains righteousness on you.'

"Eons ago our Creator conceived all that exists. Our Creator breathed life onto the earth and proclaimed all was good. Then, man sinned against the Creator and this brought forth evil and death. Evil and death have been with us to this day.

"We, the creatures of Earth, are here today to declare that this is a good day for the human race to repent, for we know that if man will repent and change his ways, the Creator--Who is Love--will forgive. But, we, who have suffered and died for ages because of the sins of humans, are dedicated to the proposition that if the human race chooses to continue in their evil ways, a complete separation from all humans is the only way we, the creatures of the earth, can survive.

"We, the creatures of Earth, trust the Creator with all our hearts that our eons of suffering and death will not be in vain. The prosecution rests its case, Your Honor."

Sly Neocon rose to deliver his closing remarks. "The human race is being persecuted by the creatures of the earth. We are constantly cleaning up their messes. Bears and raccoons knock over trash cans; deer, moose, and elk smack into our vehicles; squirrels and mice chew up everything in our attics; bees and hornets sting us; and birds pollute everything with their droppings. It is just one thing after another. Animals are always causing a problem.

"In recent years we have even seen whales kill their trainers. We take the whales out of the ocean, feed them, give them a nice little pool to live in, and what do they do? They kill the hand that feeds them! Tigers and lions are the same. Give them all the comforts of a wonderful cage and they turn around and maul their trainers. Evil is what they are! Bats! There's a creature that comes out only at night...flying all over the place...hell, you can't figure out what they're up to. God put humans on a planet full of creepy, wild things.

"Humans are absolutely in charge. I am Sly Neocon, the greatest, most powerful attorney on Earth. I know the law, and the law says we are in charge. These creatures do nothing but complain. Humans should kill every last one of them...every bug, every bird, every reptile, every amphibian...and also those damn whales and dolphins. Kill them! Kill them all! They should all be dead! Then, humans would be better off!" Sly's voice had reached a crescendo. "I know I have the answer. I have the solution. Kill them! Kill them all! Then there will be no more questioning our authority. Our authority is absolute! If those creatures want to voice their opinions, let their bones be their voice from their graves!

"I am Sly Neocon, master attorney for the human race. God created man and gave him dominion over all things. Complete, absolute control. Genesis 1:27-28, says, 'God created man in his

own image. In God's image he created him...God blessed them. God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'

"This is the word of God. The word *dominion* clearly means dominance and supremacy. These words state absolutely that man can do whatever he chooses, anytime he chooses. Man's supreme authority is complete and perfect. Man's authority should never be questioned. The idea that man could make a mistake or act unjustly is preposterous!

"This trial is a farce and these shenanigans traitorous to the principalities of earth! This trial is a conspiracy contrived by a couple of delusional vultures, a pitiful eagle, and an ignorant owl...whoever heard of such malarkey! Humans spend their lives helping them, and then these backstabbers complain to God.

"I am Neocon, the greatest lawyer on Earth. Let this Court be warned...I will never have my time wasted again on such a trivial pursuit. I am...I am too powerful to deal with this foolishness! If these creatures ever dare to bring the human race to trial again, I will have everyone here indicted for treason against the principalities of earth. I will have the traitors tortured unmercifully, and then I will personally kill them myself."

Judge Sophia looked down at Sly and warned, "Be careful, Mr. Neocon; your words are being recorded. You are done with your closing remarks. The Court has heard enough of your tirade."

When Sly took his seat, Judge Sophia announced, "The jury will now go into deliberation. When a decision has been reached, the Court will notify both parties. Court is now adjourned."

Chapter 24

The day after closing statements had been heard, Justice received notice that the jury had reached a decision and Court would reconvene on the next day punctually at the eleventh hour. Everyone awaited the verdict with anticipation. The evening was spent speculating about what the verdict would be and analyzing the trial proceedings. Melisa was the most confident of a positive outcome, Solomon was reserved, and Justice thought they had presented a good case. David was hopeful and tried to absorb some of Melissa's enthusiasm.

The next morning all four sat tensely in the courtroom. The bailiff, the angel Ariel, summoned all to rise as Judge Sophia entered the courtroom. Once she was seated, the bailiff announced that all should be seated. Judge Sophia spoke in a solemn voice, "Before the verdict is announced, I will make a brief statement. The death of David, Jr. was a willful act of cruelty and will not go unpunished. This court offers its sincere condolences to David and Melissa and assures them that David, Jr. is safely flying in Heaven. The tragedy of his death came to the Creator's attention because of his remarkable flying skills. The Creator takes great pleasure in watching him fly. When the Creator first saw David, Jr., He asked, 'Who is that vulture that flies like an eagle?' Subsequently, David, Jr. was given an audience with the Creator. He told the Creator that his father had taught him how to fly, and he also told how he had died on Earth and how sad his parents were.

Our Creator felt great compassion for David, Jr. and his parents. The genesis of this trial came from that meeting in Heaven, and it was the Creator who gave David his revelation. The Creator hereby grants to you, David and Melissa, the same gift given to Abraham in Genesis 13:16, 'I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring may also be counted.' David, Jr. looks forward to having many siblings."

Judge Sophia then ordered the representatives of the human race to rise. Sly Neocon and George stood; both of their faces bore smirks of arrogance, for they fully expected the human race to be declared innocent of all crimes.

Judge Sophia spoke to the jury, "In regards to the case before us, Vultures vs. Human Race, how does the jury find?"

Barachiel, the head juror, stood and read the verdict. "We, the jury, find the human race guilty of the following crimes: shedding innocent blood; masterminding wicked schemes; engaging in monumental misconduct and wrongdoing; causing willful strife, disputes, and wars; destroying nature and creating environmental disasters; exercising complicity in a conspiracy of lies; condoning a deceptive and fraudulent witness; and taking virulent pride in evil behavior.

As soon as the last word of the guilty verdict was spoken, George, the warmonger, collapsed into his chair. His face registered total shock, and he repeatedly cried, "Do something, Sly! Do something!" George pulled on the bottom of Sly's suit coat and whimpered, "They're going to take all of my money...I'll lose my power...I don't want to go to jail....I don't want to be tortured...."

Sly Neocon rose to his full height, his eyes glowed red, and his face was contorted with pure enmity. Suddenly, he lunged at Judge Sophia, ranting, "You can't do this! I will use force against you if I have to!"

Instantly seven angels, all renowned for impeding demons, surrounded Sly so that he could not move. George was still seated, weeping uncontrollably, still muttering, "They're going to take all of my money...I'll lose my power...I don't want to go to jail....I don't want to be tortured...."

Sly looked down at George with disdain and snarled, "Shut up, you wimp, before I have you tortured and hanged myself." Then Sly crossed his arms and stood in total contempt and defiance of the Court.

Judge Sophia announced in a resonating voice, "The human race has been found guilty of the following: shedding innocent blood; masterminding wicked schemes; engaging in monumental misconduct and wrongdoing; causing willful strife, disputes, and wars; destroying the elements of nature and causing environmental disasters; exercising complicity in a conspiracy of lies; condoning a deceptive and fraudulent witness; and taking virulent pride in evil behavior.

"I, therefore, decree to the human race the following edict as written in the Scriptures in Deuteronomy 30:19, 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your descendants....' Likewise," continued Judge Sophia, "in Deuteronomy 4:29, it is written, 'But from there you shall seek Yahweh your God, and you shall find him, when you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.'"

Judge Sophia looked sternly at Sly Neocon and George, the warmonger, as she warned, "The human race should carefully consider Judgment Day, for as Matthew 24:36, says, 'But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.' As Judge Sophia cast her eyes on all the humans in the courtroom, she said, "The human race has been given irreplaceable precious time to repent before final adjudication. My grave advice is to use that time wisely for that time may be short.

"The verdict has been spoken. The edict has been declared on Earth and recorded in Heaven. The jury and I have one final statement. We thank Melissa for asking the question that all in Heaven have been asking for so many centuries: Why does the human race hate Jesus? I say to every man, woman, and child, make sure you are not deceived by evil. This day is a good day to be under Great Grace. To choose Great Grace is to be one with our Great Creator.

"This Court applauds David and Melissa for their courage in bringing this case before the Court. We further extol their choice of such a brilliant legal team." Judge Sophia gazed down at George, the warmonger, who was still seated, and said authoritatively, "George, stand up and show respect."

George slowly stood up, still whimpering, "They're going to take all of my money...I'll lose my power...I don't want to go to jail....I don't want to be tortured...."

Judge Sophia continued her pronouncement. "The human race could have selected much better representatives than the two of you. Humans need to make better choices."

Suddenly, Sly interrupted Judge Sophia and retorted, "I am the greatest lawyer on Earth!"

Judge Sophia peered at Sly and cautioned him, "This would be a good time for you to remain silent, Mr. Neocon. By the power granted to me from Heaven, I charge you, Sly Neocon, and you, George, to make sure that David and Melissa and their legal team are guaranteed safe passage back to their homes. Beware and let no harm come to any of them because the guardian angels I have assigned will not only protect them but also report back to me. Court is dismissed."

When David, Melissa, Justice, and Solomon returned to their assigned chamber, Solomon jubilantly spoke, "I believe we have a victory. The human race has been found guilty, but the Creator has given them a chance to repent."

"Do you think they will?" asked David.

"It is totally up to them," said Solomon.

"Well," added Melissa, "There is hope and we must have faith. Just as Hebrews 11:1 says, 'Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.'"

Chapter 25

The next day Melissa and Justice were discussing their plans for the return trip to their respective abodes. They both agreed that everyone needed some relaxation after the stress of the trial. David and Solomon were at the other end of the chamber discussing some of the highlights of Solomon's testimony and chuckling over a few of George's absurd comments.

Late in the afternoon a dove named Peace flew into the room, spoke quietly to Justice so only she could hear, and then left. Justice smiled. "I have good news, my friends. Many humans have heard of our court case for justice for all creatures, and they have decided the time for change is now before it is too late. New programs are being initiated to protect the environment and to find peaceful resolutions to human kind's conflicts. Resources are already being donated at a rapid rate to fund these new programs. Moreover, the United Nations has declared that June 5th will be World Environment Day and September 21st will be International Day of Peace. Pope Francis has also decreed a lengthy proclamation calling for all people of all nations to join together to save the earth."

Justice had just finished speaking when Peace returned and again spoke quietly to her. As soon as Peace left, Solomon, Melissa, and David turned to Justice in anticipation. Justice exclaimed, "I can't believe it, but there is more good news! Word has traveled quickly about the trial and our victory. Humans in Los Angeles, New York City, Colorado Springs, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, and Ottawa have declared May 30th National Animal Rights Day, and more cities are pledging to join in. A global organization has been established to promote the rights of animals and the conservation of planet Earth. Its name and slogan is 'Our Planet...Theirs Too.' They have even written a Declaration of Animal Rights."

The excitement in the room had not moderated one iota when Peace returned with yet another message. After listening to Peace, Justice could not contain herself and blurted out, "December 10th will be International Animal Rights Day and will be celebrated all over the world. We have truly won! Our Creator has blessed us!"

David looked at his mate and his friends. "Yes," he said, "we have won, but there is still much to be done. We must remember those that died so we could accomplish this mission and all those creatures that are still suffering. Let us give thanks to our Creator and say a prayer that the suffering will eventually end for all creatures. Only then will it be time to truly celebrate."

"You have spoken wisely, David," said Justice. "Our work is not yet completed. Let's meet again on May 30 at the Tree of Life by the waterfalls to discuss the progress that has been made toward justice for all creatures and saving our earth, and we will plan our next course of action."

Melissa, David, Justice, and Solomon all agreed and bowed their heads in prayer to their great Creator.

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Informative Websites

Animal Rights Organizations

To find a list of animal rights organizations, go to the National Conference on Animal Rights website at <http://www.arconference.org/exhibitors.htm>

Environmental Issues

To find a list of environmental organizations, go to National Resources Defense Council at www.nrdg.org

Social Justice Organizations

To find a list of social justice organizations, go to www.startguide.org

Community Organizing

Center for Community Change at www.communitychange.org

National People's Action at www.npa-us.org

One day when we meet our Creator, we will be asked, "How did you treat the creatures that I created on Earth?" Then, we will all finally be animal rights advocates. And, one day when we meet our Creator, we will be asked, "How did you treat the planet Earth that I created?" Then, we will all finally be environmentalists and conservationists. --- Amos

News Flash: The Verdict Is In

The human race is being summoned to Court on Mount High. They can have one witness in their defense. Whom will they choose? A famous spiritual leader like Pope Francis or the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso? A humanitarian like President Jimmy Carter, Bill Gates, Malala Yousafzai, Warren Buffet, Chuck Fenney, Richard Branson, George or Betty Moore, Ion Huntsman, Sr., or George Soros? A celebrity like Ellen DeGeneres, Jon Stewart, Howard Stern, Kesha, or Bono? Or has destiny caught the human race by surprise?



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