

Greg

DOUGLAS H. THAYER

When Greg woke up he lay on his stomach. The shaft of sunlight coming through the window hit his gold tennis trophy, Kellie's gold-framed picture and his clock on top of the dresser. Priesthood meeting was at nine. Greg buried his face in his pillow, closed his hands into fists and shoved them under his chest. He had promised Kellie again last night that during priesthood he would see Bishop Swensen in his office, confess what he had done, explain that she was pregnant, and ask what he had to do to repent. At ten-thirty he would pick up Kellie; they would go see her bishop, and then go tell their parents and make arrangements for the wedding that week. He tightened his fists, pushed his face deeper into the pillow. This was one of the sins you had to confess to your bishop to be forgiven of, but he knew that he still couldn't do it.

He wanted to get in his Mustang and drive as far away from Provo as he could get, say goodbye to everything and everybody. If he left he would still feel sinful all the time, no matter how often he showered and changed his clothes, but at least he wouldn't be around his family and friends who loved him. He had prayed, tried to repent, made all kinds of promises to God if only Kellie wouldn't be pregnant and he was clean again and wouldn't have to get married. But she didn't have a miscarriage. He wanted everything the way it had been. Kellie had always been popular at school.

His face in the pillow, Greg heard Kim running the shower in the hall bathroom. Kim had just turned twelve and been made a deacon; he had his new suit to be ordained in and to pass the sacrament in. During the week he had just finished collecting his fast offerings for the first time, and he had his packet of blue envelopes ready to turn in this morning. They had shared the end bedroom before Steve went on his mission, and since April they had played a lot of tennis together.

Douglas Thayer, Associate Professor at Brigham Young University, is the author of many published short stories in *Dialogue* and elsewhere. He has a book length collection ready for publication and is working on a novella.

Kim always said, "Hey, Greg, come on, hurry, or we won't get a court." Kim went out and sat in the Mustang to wait for him after he got home from work at Carson's Market, where he was a bagger. Like Roger and Steve, Greg had earned his Eagle Scout badge (he didn't get his Duty to God Award) and graduated from seminary. Already Kim had his First Class badge. Greg couldn't stand to think about his father and older brothers knowing about Kellie, but it was even worse if his mother and Kim knew.

Downstairs in the living room Roger's, Steve's, and Kim's pictures stood on the fireplace mantel, in order of age, all of them smiling (they were Roger's and Steve's missionary pictures). In his picture he was still the same as his brothers. He and Kim always went to watch Roger and Steve when they played on the Provo High tennis team.

The hall phone rang three times, then stopped. Greg lifted his head out of the pillow. His mother had taken it on the kitchen extension. His father had already left for his high council meeting. He let his head sink. For three months their ringing phone stopped him, made him turn. It scared him that somebody had found out about Kellie and him and was calling to tell his mother and father. Now sometimes he had an ache in the back of his throat and his eyes would suddenly fill with tears. He didn't ever cry, although he was afraid he would.

He tightened his jaws, pushed his face deeper into the pillow. He had to black out his mind when he started to think that people would know that he had gotten Kellie pregnant in her father's cabin in Provo Canyon. His former Primary and Junior Sunday School teachers came up to him in church to shake his hand. "Well, now that you've graduated from high school you'll be going on your mission in a year, won't you, Greg," they said. "Your parents are proud of their boys" (a miscarriage was natural).

Sundays he stood at his bedroom window and watched the neighbors walking to their meetings. He had been blessed, baptized, and confirmed in the chapel, received all of his priesthood ordinations there. He passed it every day driving up Ninth East to Kellie's. It was as if he had lied to everybody, so he couldn't be happy.

He had been named the best-dressed boy at Provo High last year, he would start at B.Y.U. next month, and he was going on his mission in a year (his father had started a mission savings account for him when he was born). But if he and Kellie got married, he might as well publish an announcement in the *Herald* that she was pregnant. All the other priests in the quorum would know. Every six months Bishop Swensen talked to the quorum about chastity and the feeling of being clean. They were supposed to see Bishop Swensen if they had any problems. He would be the only married priest in the ward. He had known some of the priests in the quorum all of his life. Everybody at Provo High knew who slept around and who didn't, although it was supposed to be a secret.

One night he drove his Mustang out on the freeway at ninety miles an hour to crash into the big square cement overpass supports near the American Fork exit, a note in his shirt pocket. But he imagined himself after death as a suicide (he could actually see himself as a person), so it was stupid. He and Kellie should have gone to Reno and gotten married that first week, but they couldn't be sure that early. Because an abortion was murder, he hadn't been able even to talk to Kellie about one. It would only make her unhappier than she already was. Being married changed too many things.

He wanted to join the army and volunteer for hazardous duty somewhere, just say goodbye and go, everything simple again and in order. But he couldn't imagine his life away from his family, and Kellie, pregnant, had become somebody he shouldn't leave. Yet he couldn't stand people loving him if he didn't deserve it; he wanted to tell them not to. He felt better when he thought about the wrong things other people did.

Greg raised his face out of the pillow and looked at his clock. He listened to the shower. Kim had ridden with him the last three Sundays, since he had become a deacon. He would tell Kim he wasn't going this morning, make some excuse, and then go get Kellie to talk again. The full-length mirror on the back of the open closet door reflected his clothes, all hung in order, and his line of polished shoes. When he went downstairs on Monday mornings, his mother already had his dirty clothes in the washer. By Tuesday his fresh, ironed shirts hung in the closet and his other clean clothes were in his drawer.

"Bishop Swensen, Kellie and I have made a mistake I need to talk to you about." He pushed his face back into the pillow, grabbed his upper arms, squeezed, curled under the sheet. Every Sunday ward members sat on the foyer chairs waiting to see the bishop in his office. Whatever he planned to say, it meant the same thing. Bishop Swensen always shook his hand, complimented him; he knew the whole Swensen family. He had gone through school with David.

He wanted to go on a mission (every day he saw the elders from the language training mission at B.Y.U.), graduate from college, go to dental school, live in Provo the rest of his life and raise a family, be a part of everything. Roger was in law school at Stanford, married to Stephanie, and they had Sammy, who was one now. Steve, still on his mission in Italy, was going to be an engineer. If they hadn't started going up to Kellie's father's cabin to do the yard work, nothing would have happened.

The high-school biology films showed the fertilized human egg, the weekly growth of the fetus, how it grew and grew, Kellie getting bigger and bigger, which he couldn't stop, his whole life hard because of just one mistake. He had planned to do a lot of different things before he got married and became a father. Kellie was great, but he hadn't thought of any girl as his wife. He wanted to have a son, hold him, feel his weight, hear his sounds, see his face, choose his name (over the front-room desk his mother had the framed family pedigree chart, little oval face pictures by some of the names).

He wanted to name his son, bless him, have his father, Roger, and Steve in the circle with him in front of the whole ward. He wanted to bear his testimony of Christ afterward about how wonderful it was to be married and have a son, an eternal family of his own, now that he was back from his mission. But it took a year to repent and be worthy, so they wouldn't make him an elder in time to bless his own son. Blessing his own son was one of the things they would take away from him. The Relief Society could help Kellie go away and have the baby, get it adopted by members, but Kellie didn't want to do that. He didn't want her to be any unhappier than she was, even though some of it was her fault. Before he had known exactly how his life would be.

He loosened his arms, straightened out under the sheet. He turned his head. Particles of dust floated in the bright shaft of window sunlight. After his shower he used to like to stand in the sun and lift his weights to see his body

better. Now it was like he had grown scales. He wanted to stab himself in the chest with a knife until the tight feeling went away and his body was light and free again. It scared him that sometimes he wanted to live with Kellie all the time, not caring about anything else, be carnal, just let his body take over and always be that way. (In his Book of Mormon seminary class they studied repentance and what carnal meant. He felt carnal now. He knew what it meant now.)

"Greg, oh, Greg," Kellie had said when they drove back down Provo Canyon from her father's cabin, and started to cry again. Still numb with surprise at what he had done, he drove up on the B.Y.U. campus, and while they walked from one quad to the next in the darkness between the lamps, he explained *again* that nobody else had to know. As long as they repented, never did it again, tried to perfect their lives, everything was just between them and Jesus Christ. Even though a person's sins were as red as scarlet, they would be washed away, made as white as snow, and then the Lord didn't remember them any more if the person repented. It was supposed to be a wonderful feeling.

In the Bible and the Book of Mormon, David, Paul, Alma, and the sons of Mosiah had committed sins, but they had repented, became great church leaders, some saw Christ even. He told Kellie that everything would be all right if they repented, kept clean for a year before they got married in the temple (his mission would take twice that long). They wouldn't even know that they had done something wrong, couldn't remember it, feel the pain. Their lives wouldn't be hard or complicated anymore. He *liked* Kellie. He really wanted her to get married in the temple so that she could go to the celestial kingdom. It surprised him that he could only think of time as eternal; he wanted all of his good feelings back.

Every night and morning that first month he prayed on his knees for forgiveness and that Kellie wouldn't be pregnant. She couldn't be pregnant. It had really only happened just that once. He prayed over and over again in the name of Jesus Christ, promised that he would dedicate his whole life to the Church, go on two missions. He tried every day to be perfect in his thoughts and actions to prove that he was serious, to test God. But all the time he knew that he had to confess to Bishop Swensen even if Kellie had a miscarriage, or was not even pregnant.

"Hey, Greg, you can have the shower."

He raised his head off the pillow.

"Hey Greg."

"Okay."

Greg turned from the window and lay on his back looking up at the white ceiling. He never knew when he would have the ache in his throat, his eyes filling with tears. It was always sudden, and he had to turn away from people.

The pain was physical, a tight growing heaviness he couldn't take medicine for. He wanted to fly, rise up above Provo, his arms wings, grow lighter and freer the higher he went until he vanished even to himself.

Once he had tried to joke with Kellie about what had happened, but that meant he didn't know how to feel anything, not right or wrong. But if he confessed, told his parents, everybody would see him as a different person. When he thought about telling his mother, he had to close his eyes. At the family

reunions his uncles and older cousins held up the new babies born the past year and told their names. The whole family would know what he had done. It was as if he had made people sick or broken their bones.

In the six-month interviews with Bishop Swensen, he'd only had to confess a little fooling around, but now he felt just like the bishop said an immoral priest would (he wanted to go down into a deep mine shaft and have it cave in). Kim liked to sit with the deacons, all the deacons wearing dress shirts and ties and some of them jackets. Even if nobody told Kim about Kellie, he would understand later.

"We have to confess, Greg," Kellie kept saying. It was as if confession were more important for her even after she knew that she was pregnant, than it was for him. Even though Kellie was one of the nicest girls he'd ever gone steady with, he sometimes now wanted her to vanish, dissolve, melt, so that nobody would ever know she was pregnant, his life simple again, happy.

Yet, assigned to bless the sacrament, he had to sit on his hands to keep from jumping up in front of the whole ward and shouting that Kellie was pregnant. He wanted to tell every customer at Carson's whose groceries he bagged, write Roger and Steve, wanted to go down on his knees to tell his mother and Kim (his mother loaned him money when he needed it). He wanted there to be a movie of all the rotten things each priest in the quorum had ever done, and they would have to sit through the movies with him so that they couldn't ever laugh at him because of Kellie.

He lay there still looking up at the white ceiling, then got out of bed. He put on his robe, looked down out of the window. His Mustang glistened in the sunlight. Every Sunday men and boys walked by their house going to priesthood. He had gone to church in the ward his whole life. He raised his hands into the shaft of sunlight palms up. He didn't like to hear people were getting married or see babies or pregnant women. He had liked being twelve. Kim had the same fast offering packet he'd had, except the envelopes were blue now. He kept thinking of all the things his parents had done for him.

He turned from the window. The sunlight still hit his tennis trophy and Kellie's graduation picture. "Yes," he always said when she asked him if he loved her, and he always put his arm around her shoulder. After he bought her the wedding band and took her to Salt Lake to get the test so that they would know for sure, she asked him more often. He would have to get a better job, work full-time, go to college only part-time, rent an apartment, pay bills. Kellie had always been fun, but it scared him to have to imagine his whole life with her. He didn't know how to feel.

He had to see her once more and figure out everything again. Last week they had decided to go to California; they would write their families to say goodbye, that they would be married in Nevada on the way and be back in a year. Figuring things out so much was like telling lies.

Kellie directed the singing in Junior Sunday School. Her father was in the stake Sunday School presidency, and her mother taught Primary. "Greg, it's nice to see you again," her mother always said; her little brother and two sisters wanted him to come to their family night. He pressed his forehead against the wall, closed his eyes, shoved his fists under his arms, squeezed. He wanted to phone Kellie's parents to tell them, not have to watch their faces. He never felt happy any more.

Roger and Stephanie had sent out over six hundred reception invitations, and they spent a whole day in their apartment opening wedding presents, the living room full of white tissue paper and white boxes. He and Kellie wouldn't be able to have a reception now, which was stupid.

He wanted to go up to Alta on a clear blue day after it had snowed all night, be the only person on the lift, not take Kim, who had skied with him all winter. (Roger and Steve liked to ski Alta best). And he wanted to ski the powder to his waist, make the only trails, be surrounded by all that white, and the cloudless blue sky. And he wanted to ski and ski, the powder swirling up around him, feel only the smoothness and absolute control of skiing, ski until he remembered nothing but white. His new Lange boots were a Christmas present from his parents last year.

Standing there, Greg opened his eyes and moved his forehead from contact with the wall. He held his tingling hands under his arms. He had wanted to smash his hands against the rock wall of Kellie's father's cabin. He couldn't stay busy enough not to think. He had tried to change the feeling alone. Christ needed to be somebody he could phone or go to his office to see.

In seminary they had discussed how a person could become dead to all righteousness, his life stopped, if he didn't repent so the Lord could help him. He wanted to lose all memory of what he had done wrong and not feel anything. They had only done it once, not over and over again every day, which would have been like everything getting darker.

"Greg?" His mother knocked. "It's after eight. You don't want to be late for priesthood. Breakfast is almost ready."

Greg turned to face the door. "Okay, Mom."

"Don't fall back to sleep, son."

"Okay, Mom."

His mother called Kim and then walked back down the hall. After he had taken Kellie home that night and got her to stop crying, he wanted to drive down to the Provo Cold Storage Plant, go in the big room where their locker was, and freeze, stop the feeling. He wanted everybody to have done something wrong.

Greg opened his door and walked across the hall to the bathroom. Kim's wet footprints showed on the tile floor and beads of water ran down the shower walls. Kim had gone back three times to collect the Snyders' fast offering. He wore his new clothes only on Sunday (with his birthday money he had bought shoes, socks, tie and shirt to go with his new suit). He always stopped in the chapel foyer to look at Steve's and the other missionaries' pictures. When they turned twelve, their birthday present from their parents was the new suit.

Greg turned on the shower hard to let the water beat against the top of his head and face. He would tell Kim that he had a headache. His mother would leave right after breakfast for her Sunday School inservice meeting. He closed his eyes. He didn't like to shower anymore; he wanted his body always covered with layers of clothes. (He kept trying to remember what it was like to be twelve and have the priesthood new.) He had to force himself to play tennis with Kim.

After he took Kellie home, he drove around for two hours before he parked in the driveway (he had driven by Bishop Swensen's house three times). He sat in the Mustang and looked at his parents' bedroom window, rested his head against the steering wheel, the ache coming in his throat, but he didn't cry. He

wanted to ring the doorbell and ask if he could come in. He showered, soaped his body again and again that night, but there wasn't enough soap and hot water in the world to make him happy. The next morning he showered again, turned the shower on full-force cold to numb his body and mind, wore all clean clothes, polished his shoes again, but he couldn't change how his body felt.

He couldn't stop thinking about the biology film, the human egg already growing if it was fertilized. He wanted to pull a lever to make everything again like it had been. He didn't have any right to even say goodbye. He wanted repentance to feel great and then to tell everybody about it.

The hall phone rang again. Greg opened his eyes and turned down the shower. He wanted to press his whole body against the cool tile wall. The phone stopped. His mother always started Sunday dinner before she left for Sunday School.

He had been terrified of going downstairs to breakfast the first morning because he thought that his parents and Kim would know just by looking into his face what he had done. "Son," his father said as they knelt around the table by their chairs for family prayer, "it's your turn." The tablecloth touching his cheek, he had prayed, stunned that he could because he was lying, expected to be struck dumb, but he hadn't been. (His mother ran the boat when the family went waterskiing.)

He met Kellie after every class they didn't take together, held both her hands, put his arms around her shoulder. And it amazed him that none of their friends stopped and said, "What's wrong with you two? You're different." He practiced with the tennis team, showered, talked to his teachers. He saw kids who had reputations for sleeping around. He didn't want anybody to think that about him or Kellie. Girls had dropped out of school during the year because they got pregnant. The night he and Kellie graduated he watched the face of every person who walked across the stage to get a diploma.

In seminary they had learned that to be carnally minded was death. The pioneers used to stand up in meetings and confess all of their sins to the ward. After the first month, every day he waited for Kellie to phone him and say she'd had a miscarriage, so they wouldn't have to get married. Her mother baked him a birthday cake; her little brother and sisters bought him a present. He had ruined it all. Stupid.

Blessing the sacrament was the hardest thing he did. That first Sunday when he stood to break the bread into the silver trays, he thought that Bishop Swensen would suddenly stand up in front of the whole ward and say into the microphone, "No, Greg, stop. You shouldn't bless the sacrament." The silver bread trays glinted in the sunlight as the deacons carried them from row to row under the windows. He blessed the water. His mother, Kim, and the whole ward looked up at him and the other two priests (his father had a high council assignment).

Sitting at the sacrament table, he had put his hands under his arms and squeezed against the pain. The Relief Society washed and ironed the linen sacrament cloths. He had lost the feeling for blessing the sacrament, singing hymns, listening to prayers, hearing talks and lessons. When he was a deacon he would open his eyes to watch Roger's face when he blessed the sacrament. Even the meaning of words had changed. He needed to jump off a cliff, but

keep falling, fall off the world, just have that sensation forever. Reaching up, he turned off the shower and got out.

In his room, he combed his hair first, and then started to dress. He'd always liked the feel of a fresh long-sleeved dress shirt against his skin; sometimes he didn't wear a jacket so that he could feel the shirt. His mother bought him new clothes for Christmas and his birthday. He kept a wax shine on his Mustang because of the feeling. Sitting on the edge of his bed, he put on his polished shoes. He put on his watch and dug for a handkerchief in his drawer. He was afraid of crying.

An abortion or Kellie going away to have the baby so that it could be adopted by a member family seemed simple, sometimes. He looked up at Kellie's picture. He didn't drive by the temple now unless he had to. At night, illuminated, the temple was almost white. He and Kellie had only done it once, but he felt like he had burned down the house or something. What he had done seemed written down. He and Kellie had always had their own set of rules about what was wrong for them to do.

"Hey, Greg, you ready?" His door opened and Kim stuck just his head in. "Mom said to hurry. It's eight-thirty."

He looked at his clock. "Go ahead. Tell Mom I'll be down in a minute."

"Okay, but hurry." Kim closed the door. He didn't put on his jacket until after he ate. Kim shined his new shoes every Sunday; they were just like Greg's newest pair.

Greg combed his hair again in the dresser mirror. The sun had left Kellie's picture and his tennis trophy. He would eat first and then tell Kim he wasn't going; his mother would think that he wasn't feeling well. Kim would be disappointed. Already Kim looked forward to saying one of the prayers at his missionary farewell, next spring. Kim and he had said the prayers at Steve's farewell, and Roger had flown out from Stanford to speak.

But there wouldn't be any farewell for him now. The other priests in the quorum would go on missions, have their pictures in the chapel foyer, learn foreign languages, convert people, but the Church wouldn't let him go. Roger, who had gone to Germany, had been a first assistant to his mission president. He put his comb in his pocket. He didn't like to see the groups of missionaries from the language training mission; they were happy; they did something.

He didn't turn from the mirror. He wanted Bishop Swensen to have a big book in the office with all of his awards, certificates, Scout badges listed, the tithing he had paid, all of the hours he had spent working on the stake welfare farm, at the cannery, and with his attendance at all the meetings he had been to all his life. And he wanted the bishop to say, "Well, Greg, I will just cross off your Eagle badge, your seminary graduation, and all your tithing to pay for what you have done. Now the Lord forgives you. You don't have to worry about Kellie or the baby, or get married. You can go on your mission. You will feel clean like you were before, and Kellie is a nice girl."

He would have to start all over if he stayed in Provo. A carnal person's body was different from a good person's; he felt and understood things in a different way. He couldn't change back, really repent, unless he went to his bishop so Christ could help him. Greg turned from the mirror. He'd stopped praying three weeks ago. He couldn't believe that his mother and father or brother had ever done anything really wrong (Kim was too young).

He walked to his door, opened it and went down the hall. He stopped at the head of the stairs and turned to look back at the family pictures on the wall. Some of the family lines connected to Bible genealogy and went clear back to Adam. In the resurrection a person had a bright recollection of all of his unrepented sins and knew everybody else's unrepented sins.

At the bottom of the stairs he stopped again. Kim was talking to his mother. His father was gone to his meeting. He turned and looked at the front door. He could get in his Mustang and drive away, pick up Kellie; he would just leave a note saying goodbye. Sunday had always been a relaxed good day. Everybody was happier and kinder on Sunday.

Kellie would be in maternity clothes for at least five months. Sunday after Sunday he would have to sit next to her in church, and every week she would be a little bigger. Even if they lived in another Provo ward after they got married, some people would know about them, and feel sorry for them and their families. But people couldn't ask when the baby would be born. Both his and Kellie's families were among the most active in their wards. He walked down the hall. Sammy had received a lot of presents when he was born.

"Hey, Greg, come on. We'll be late. I already said the blessing."

"Oh." He sat down, spread his napkin on his lap, and drank half his orange juice. Kim had his tie tucked inside his shirt while he ate. On Sundays they had family prayer at dinner, when his father was home.

"Good morning, Son."

"Good morning, Mom," he said, but he didn't look above the level of the gleaming white stove and dishwater.

"How many eggs do you want this morning, Greg?"

He raised his head. His mother, two eggs in her right hand, held the refrigerator door open. "I'm not very hungry. I'll just eat some cereal." The top door shelf was full of eggs.

"Don't you feel well, son?"

"I'm okay, I guess."

"Would you like something else?" His mother closed the refrigerator door.

"No thank you."

He poured milk on one shredded wheat, cut it with his spoon. He looked up at his mother who faced the cupboards. The heavy knife lay on the sideboard by the half of loaf of homemade bread. Yesterday when he was adjusting the timing on the Mustang, he had wanted to push his hands into the whirling fan, afterwards walk into the kitchen and show his mother, tell her about Kellie then.

"The deacons quorum is going to plan a swimming party to Saratoga, Greg."

He closed his eyes, tightened his jaws. Roger and Steve would shake his hand, put an arm around his shoulder, and ask him what they could do to help, say that they loved him. He would want to explain how it all happened, how one thing just led to another; how did he tell them that it only happened once? He pushed back his chair, stood up. "I guess I wasn't even as hungry as I thought. Excuse me."

"Are you sure you're all right, son? You've looked a little pale lately."

"I'll go brush my teeth."

"Now Kim, you sit there and finish your breakfast. You don't have to be running after Greg every minute."

"Ah, Mom, isn't Greg going to priesthood?"

After he had brushed his teeth and combed his hair, he stood by his window looking down at the street. Jeff Walker and his dad passed along going to priesthood, Brother Cory behind them. Greg looked over at his clock. If he confessed to Bishop Swensen today and married Kellie during the week, next Sunday the whole quorum would know. He would be the only married priest. If the bishop let him meet with the elders, he would be with all the married returned missionaries, all of them married in the temple. When they brought their first new babies to church, all through the meeting they kept bending down to kiss them. Roger had sent Sammy's hospital picture and Greg's mother had a miniature made for the family pedigree chart hanging in the front room.

"Greg." He turned from the window. Kim stood in the doorway.

"Hey, Greg, it's time to go. Aren't you going?" He carried his packet of blue fast-offering envelopes in his right hand.

Greg turned. More men and boys walked to priesthood; two cars went by. Later, mothers and fathers would pass taking their children to Sunday School, and then in the evening again whole families would be going to sacrament meeting.

"Greg, you feel all right don't you?"

The priests sat together on the right side of the chapel. Bishop Swensen always stopped to shake hands with each priest and ask him if he'd had a good week and if he was happy. Greg turned back to Kim, who had walked into the room. The closet door mirror held both of them.

"Let's go, Greg."

He looked at their shoes. He turned from the mirror to look at Kim. He was smiling. (Kim had had him go with him to buy his new shoes at Clark's so he would be sure to get the same kind.) Greg walked slowly to the closet and got his blue blazer. "I'll be okay, I guess," he said. As he put on the blazer he looked at Kellie's picture.

"Great," Kim said.

He followed Kim down the stairs. In the hall he stopped before the mirror. He buttoned the blazer and then felt to see that he had his handkerchief.

"Goodbye, son!"

Greg stopped on the porch, turned, saw his mother framed in the hallway, but he did not speak. He turned slowly and walked down the front steps, the storm door closing behind him.

Kim already sat in the Mustang; he had the windows rolled down. Greg backed out and drove down the street. Kim had him stop to pick up Brian Madsen and David Tuttle, two deacons who were walking. They had their fast-offering packets. "You guys get all your fast offerings collected?" Kim asked.

"Sure."

"Sure."

"So did I."

Greg watched the car ahead of them slow down to turn into the chapel parking lot.

"Good," he said.