

A Visit for Tregan

Jack Harrell

Tregan Weaver was driving home from Madison High in his little black CRX on the first warm day of spring in Rexburg, Idaho. The trees along Main Street were in blossom, the lawns were turning green, and Tregan had the car windows down and Godsmack on the CD player. He stopped at the light on Second East and punched in Matt Daniels' number on his cell phone. He put in the earphone and tucked his long hair behind his ear. Tregan's hair was fine and straight, and it reached halfway down his back. He kept it clean and combed and dyed jet black, with a few strands of red and blond showing through. Tregan was just a few weeks from finishing high school, and he planned on going to Boise State in the fall. His Grandpa Law had offered to pay for his college, and his brother's too, if the boys would cut their hair and join the Mormon Church and go on missions. Tregan's older brother, Trenton, would also have to get his GED and get off probation, but he was only twenty-one, and Grandpa Law said it wasn't too late—it was never too late.

Grandpa Law—his first name was Buster—was a tall, thin man who shaved his head and wore round-toed cowboy boots, dark Wrangler jeans, and a bolo tie everywhere he went—except on Sunday, when he traded the jeans for a brown, Western-cut suit. Buster Law was a successful construction contractor who had served on the Mormon high council and in two bishoprics. He drove a big hulking pickup and carried extra copies of the Book of Mormon in Spanish and English to pass out to new employees. He was a good man, and Tregan loved him. But as far as Tregan could see, most of the people in Rexburg were good people anyway. He didn't see a connection between being Mormon and being good, and he certainly wasn't going to join the Church, any

church, just to pay for college. If he had to, he'd just work and take out loans to pay for school.

Then yesterday, Mrs. Asbury told Tregan he was one of five finalists for the Madison Education Association Scholarship, a full-ride scholarship for students attending Idaho schools. There would be a luncheon, Mrs. Asbury said, and the five finalists would be asked to stand in front of the MEA board and speak. Tregan had talked to a couple of kids who were nervous about the luncheon, but he already knew what he would say: He was going to Boise State as an anthropology major with an emphasis in urban American culture. He wasn't worried about what they wanted to hear or what they expected him to look like. He was just going to be himself.

When the light turned green, Tregan sped through the intersection while Matt's number rang for the fourth time. He was about to switch off the phone when Matt got on the line. "Hey," he said, "when are we heading out?"

"I can't go," Matt said.

"What do you mean you can't go?" Tregan asked. "We already bought tickets."

Tregan and Matt and Carlton Oakeson had been planning for two weeks to go to the Megadeth concert in Idaho Falls. Megadeth was an old-school metal band long since out of vogue, but still one of Tregan's favorites. Back in the '90s they'd been second only to Metallica; now they played in places like the Idaho Falls Civic Auditorium, a little hall with a capacity of eighteen hundred. Tregan mostly listened to new bands like Trivium and Avenged Sevenfold, but he liked a lot of musical styles. Jazz, rap, '70s punk, blues, '90s speed metal—he loved anything that was good, anything that was real. Turning down Birch Street, Tragen said to Matt, "We've been planning this for two weeks. You have to go."

"My dad says I have to drive the seed potato truck," Matt said. "I don't think he wants me to go see a band called Megadeth."

"But they're like Zeppelin or Elvis. It's rock and roll history."

"My dad's not interested in rock and roll history," Matt said.

"Can't Jake drive the potato truck?" Tregan asked.

"He's got to go to the Rexburg City Council meeting," Matt answered. "He has to get his Eagle project approved. He's building duck boxes at the nature park."

"I thought he was going to put up that plaque at Smith Park."

"The city didn't go for it," Matt said. "They said it sent the wrong message."

"The wrong message?" Tregan asked. "What message?" One of Matt's ancestors, who had helped found the city, had been a Mormon polygamist with six wives and twenty-three children. Jake had wanted to put up a plaque about him next to the walking trail at Smith Park. "I thought he was a great pioneer or something," Tregan said.

"My dad said with all these Mormon fundamentalists in the news and that one guy being put on the FBI's Most Wanted list, the city didn't want to put up a plaque about a polygamist. They said it didn't serve the community as a whole."

"And duck boxes will?" Tregan asked.

"I guess so," Matt answered.

Rexburg had originally been named Ricksburg, after Thomas E. Ricks, one of the city's Mormon founders. As the story goes, Brother Ricks had been too humble to allow a town to be named after him, so the name was changed to Rexburg, *Rex* being Latin for "king." Some said that the king the Mormon pioneers had in mind was Jesus Christ, who had visited Joseph Smith and told him to establish a new church. But times had changed. Now there was a billboard on Highway 20 that simply read "Rexburg, America's City." The people of Rexburg still believed in Jesus; they taught their children about visitations from God and angels. As far as Tragen saw it, that kind of divine visitation was a thing of the past. No one was looking for Jesus to come to Rexburg, no matter what its name had become.

Pulling into his driveway, Tregan asked Matt, "Did you talk to Carlton? I didn't see him in fifth hour."

"Didn't you hear?" Matt said. "Carlton got hit with a baseball in P.E."

"Are you kidding me? Is he okay?"

"He's got a concussion, but he's okay, I guess."

Tregan shut off his engine and sat for a minute. He looked up at the empty house. His dad wouldn't be home for another hour, and it was anybody's guess when Trenton would be home. Tregan let out a sigh. "So I'm the only one going to this concert?" he finally asked.

"Sorry, dude," Matt said, "I'm just not into these guys enough to take on my dad. I gotta choose my battles."

"I know," Tregan said. "It's cool. I am gonna see these guys, though, no matter what. I mean, how often do living legends come through southeastern Idaho?"

"Listen," Matt said, "I want the whole rundown tomorrow, okay?"

"Yeah," Tregan said, "I'll talk to you in Asbury's class."

* * *

The next morning, Tregan was already in his seat in first-hour English when Matt walked in. Tregan had his textbook open to the first page of *Hamlet*. He was looking at the page but not reading it. He was full of something new, something too big to say. Mrs. Asbury was passing handouts down the rows and talking to Amber Newsome. "That's the question," she was saying to Amber. "Did Hamlet really see a ghost, or was that just what he wanted to see?"

Amber Newsome answered, "Hamlet thought it was real, and that's all that matters."

Matt sat down behind Tregan and spoke over his shoulder. "Dude," he said, "what's your deal? I messaged you like five times last night and you didn't answer. Was it awesome?"

Tregan looked back at the floor behind him. "Yeah," he whispered out of the side of his mouth, "it was great. It was amazing." He turned back around. He didn't know what else to say.

"So you went by yourself?" Matt asked.

Tregan glanced back. "Not exactly," he said. "I can't talk right now."

"Dude," Matt said, "it was Megadeth—rock and roll history. You have to talk."

The handouts came down the row to Tregan. He took one and turned around, handing the stack to Matt. "Listen," he said, "it was a different kind of night, okay? I can't talk about it right now."

After class, Tregan headed straight for the restroom. He didn't hang back to walk with Matt to ceramics. He was afraid that if he did, he'd burst into words he'd never said before. In the bathroom, he splashed water on his face and grabbed a paper towel.

He wiped his face; and when he opened his eyes, Matt was standing beside him.

"You look different," Matt said. "What happened last night?"

"Nothing," Tregan said. "It was just a great night. I'm sorry I shut you down in class."

"Something happened," Matt said. "What happened?"

"It was a great concert. It was just a little different."

"Different how?" Matt asked.

Tregan looked around. Two other guys were in the bathroom. Blake Davis was standing at the urinal. Alan Reynolds was washing his hands. Tregan waited for Alan to leave, but then Anthony Kimber came through the door and went to one of the urinals. Anthony was president of the Seminary Council. Tregan looked at Matt for a moment. Then he spoke softly. "I picked up a hitch-hiker on the way to the concert."

"That was dumb," Matt said. "Who was it?"

Tregan leaned in and whispered. "You can't tell anyone," he said. "I mean no one." He glanced over to where Anthony Kimber was standing.

"I won't tell anybody," Matt said. "Who was it?"

"It was Jesus," Tregan whispered.

"Jesus Christ?" Matt asked. Blake and Anthony both turned around and looked. Then Anthony flushed and zipped up. He went to the sink, giving Tregan and Matt a disapproving look.

"Dude," Matt said in a forced, small voice. He waited for Anthony and Blake to leave. "You're telling me that Jesus went with you to the Megadeth concert?"

"That's what I'm telling you," Tregan said.

Matt said, "You mean this guy looked like Jesus, right?"

"He did," Tregan said. "He looked like him. I mean, he wasn't like in the pictures. He had his hair in a ponytail, and he was wearing jeans and a T-shirt. But it was him. I know it was him."

"Dude, it couldn't have been him. That's just too weird."

"I know it's weird. It's freaking amazing!"

"Are you sure you didn't try something at that concert?"

Tregan looked at Matt earnestly. "You know how I feel about that stuff, with everything that's happened to Trenton."

"But maybe this guy slipped you something and you didn't notice it?"

"No," Tregan said, "I mean, it was *him*. I saw *him*. He knew things, about me, and about the band. He was with me the whole night. I dropped him off at midnight."

"You dropped him off where?"

"By a cattle field on Yellowstone Highway."

"Are you kidding me? Dude, why are you saying this? You don't even believe in Jesus."

"How do you know?" Tregan said defensively. "You don't know what I believe."

"Well, it's not like you're up there blessing the sacrament every Sunday," Matt said. "I just don't get why you're doing this." He went for the door and opened it. "It's not funny, if that's what you're going for."

Tregan stopped Matt at the doorway. "Hey," he said, "I don't get why you're mad. This is pretty weird for me, too."

Matt turned on him, almost angry. "Okay," he said, "listen." He took a moment to compose himself. "What you're saying—it's just too weird. If that's how you want to believe in Jesus, then don't believe in him at all." He put his hands on Tregan's shoulders and looked him in the eye. "I'm being your friend here, okay?" he said. "People in this town don't get you as it is. I know you're a good guy, but Jesus doesn't go to Megadeth concerts. If you went to church, you'd know that."

Matt headed off to his ceramics class, leaving Tregan bewildered at his response. Tregan already knew Jesus didn't go to Megadeth concerts—at least he wasn't supposed to. But then, Tregan didn't know much at all about what Jesus did in his free time. Maybe he would have learned if he had gone to church like his Grandpa Law wanted him to. Tregan had only been to church a few times in his whole life, usually when a friend invited him to Mutual. And his dad hadn't gone since his mom left them, right after Tregan was born. Tregan's mom had been a beautiful girl, and Buster Law and the Mormon faith combined couldn't stop her from getting pregnant and married outside the temple at sixteen. After that, Tregan's dad couldn't stop her from leaving them to work for a modeling agency in Denver. When she left, people didn't think Tregan's dad should raise the boys alone, but he didn't care what they thought. He worked hard and loved the boys.

the best he could. He didn't remarry, and he didn't take any hand-outs from Buster Law. When Buster didn't like the way things were done, Tregan's father would remind him who it was that left.

Some of the Mormon mothers in the neighborhood didn't like the length of the boys' hair. They didn't like hearing about the boys skateboarding down Main Street at midnight. Then when Trenton started getting in trouble with the law, they felt vindicated. By the time Tregan became one of Madison High School's best students, they had stopped paying attention.

But there was something none of them knew about Tregan Weaver. Matt didn't know it, Grandpa Law didn't know it, not even Tregan's father knew. God himself was the only one who knew that Tregan Weaver liked to pray. He prayed every morning and night, locking his door and kneeling by his bed, making an account of his day. Throughout the day Tregan prayed silently to a God that he imagined as an all-knowing, understanding Father—like his dad, only perfect. He'd prayed that night before going to the concert. "Dear God," he had said, kneeling down before his father came home from work, "I really don't want to go to this concert alone, but I want to see these guys. They're really good, and this might be my only chance. Please be with me, God," he had prayed that night before the concert. "Go with me and help me be safe."

Now, after talking to Matt, Tregan wondered if saying that prayer hadn't been a mistake.

* * *

Matt Daniels told only two other people what Tregan had said. He said he was worried about Tregan, and he made them swear not to tell anybody. By the end of the day, everyone at Madison High had heard the news. Walking to his car after the last bell, Tregan crossed paths with a stream of students coming out of the seminary building. Dennis Gatlin, who was on the football team, was coming straight toward him. Tregan had been trying to ignore Gatlin since junior high, when Gatlin shoved him into a gym locker. Gatlin spoke loud enough that everyone could hear. "Hey, Weaver," he said, "you should have been in Seminary today. We talked about false prophets."

The next evening, Tregan was at the kitchen stove making

Hamburger Helper when his dad came home from work. His dad was wearing his usual Levis and slate-colored City of Rexburg work shirt. His hands and arms were spotted with white flecks from painting crosswalks all day, and there were flecks of white in his short blond hair and goatee. "Hey, Son," he said. He put his lunch pail on the counter and opened it. Tregan was stirring the noodles in the pan. He didn't look up. "They were talking about you down at the city building today," his dad said. He took his thermos out of the lunch pail, poured out the old coffee, and rinsed it. "The story I heard is that you've been talking to God," he said, looking at Tregan.

"Yeah," Tregan said, stirring the noodles, "that's the story."

"Garth Ricks came into the break room this afternoon. He walks in and says, 'I thought your boy wanted that scholarship.' I said, 'He does.' Then he says, 'He must not want it anymore—not if he's telling people he goes to satanic rock concerts with God.'" He wiped out his lunch pail and threw a candy bar wrapper in the garbage. "I think you'd better tell me what's going on," he said.

"I told one person," Tregan said. "I told Matt Daniels. I didn't think he'd tell the whole school."

"News like that travels fast," Tregan's dad said. "People take their religion pretty seriously." He sat down at the table and began unlacing his work boots. "Why would you tell a story like that in the first place?"

Tregan put a lid on the pan and turned off the stove. He went to the table and sat down. Out the window, he could see Sid Ward, their next-door neighbor, trying to start his lawn mower. Sid was pulling the cord again and again. "Something weird happened the other night, Dad," Tregan began, "when I went to that concert."

"Was it a satanic band?"

"No, it was just a rock band."

"Well, then, what happened?"

Tregan explained how he'd learned at the last minute that Matt and Carlton weren't able to go, so he decided to grab something to eat and take old Yellowstone Highway to Idaho Falls. "I just decided to take my time," he said to his dad. "I didn't feel like rushing around and dealing with the traffic on Highway 20."

The day had turned to evening, and it was just starting to get

dark as he passed the golf course and drove on toward the LaBelle intersection, where he saw a hitchhiker on the side of the road. He was just standing there, looking like he was expecting someone. Tregan had never picked up a hitchhiker before, but he slowed down for this one, and then stopped.

"What did this guy look like?" his dad asked.

"He was older," Tregan said. "Thirty or forty, maybe. He had long hair and a beard. He was wearing a white T-shirt and jeans and leather sandals. He had his hair tied back in a loose ponytail."

"So he was just some hippie?"

"That's what he looked like," Tregan said.

But Tregan knew who it was. He knew the minute he saw him. Tregan looked at the road ahead, and then in the rearview mirror. There wasn't another car in sight.

The hitchhiker opened the door on the passenger side. "Going to the concert?" he asked.

Tregan nodded.

"Mind if I come along?" the man asked as he got in.

"Maybe it was just some hippie," his dad said.

"When I woke up the next morning," Tregan said, "I felt so good, like something amazing had happened. Then I started thinking maybe I dreamed it all. I talked to Matt, and he freaked out. Pretty soon the whole town was upset."

"Maybe you did dream it all," his dad said.

"It was real, Dad," Tregan said. "It was Jesus I saw on the side of that road."

Tregan's father looked at him for a long time. Then he said, "The people I know, when they say they talk to God, what they really mean is they think they can talk *for* God. And pretty soon they're talking you into things you don't want to do."

"I'm not trying to talk anyone into anything," Tregan said.

His father looked at him, raising an eyebrow.

"I promise," Tregan said.

"Can you promise you'll never see him again?" he asked.

Tregan wasn't able to answer.

* * *

The phone rang at 7:30 the next morning. It was Kelly Mitchell from News Channel 12 in Idaho Falls. She was coming to the

Rexburg studios that day, having heard about Tregan's *visitation*—that was the word she used. Kelly Mitchell was a broadcasting graduate from Michigan State who had come to Idaho Falls hoping to move to a larger market. She was looking for a story that would get her some attention. She told Tregan she wanted to include him in a series of interviews she was doing on religious conflicts. She told him about an LDS chapel in Pocatello that had been vandalized by fire. She had already interviewed a Catholic woman in Salmon who had seen the Virgin Mary in a rainbow and a truck driver in Ashton who was in trouble with the city for building a thirty-foot cross made of car hubcaps in his front yard. Tregan hung up the phone.

That afternoon the MEA scholarship luncheon was being held in a conference room of the Rexburg Cottonwood Inn. The five students nominated for the scholarship were invited to attend with their parents and meet the scholarship committee. Tregan put on a light-green, button-up shirt, black slacks, dress shoes, and the only tie he owned. His dad wore his best Levis and a new flannel shirt. When Tregan and his father walked into the conference room, Kelly Mitchell was already there with a News Channel 12 cameraman. When she saw Tregan, she turned to the cameraman and said something that made him look up. Tregan's grandfather, Buster Law, was there, too, in his round-toed cowboy boots and his brown suit and bolo tie. He was one of the members of the scholarship committee. Grandpa Law met them at their table. "It looks like this is going to be quite a to-do," he said to Tregan. "We've never had the TV news cover this event before. At least you wore a tie."

While Grandpa Law talked to Tregan, Melissa Burgess and her parents sat down at the table, followed by Nathan Aldridge and his mother. Nathan was in a suit with a white shirt and tie, and Melissa, whose cheeks seemed to be in a constant blush, was in a modest lavender dress with a small-print pattern. The members of the committee were coming around to each table, shaking hands with the nominees, congratulating parents. Most of the adults knew each other through work or church. Buster Law shook hands with Melissa and Nathan and their parents. He had once served with Melissa's father in a bishopric, and he knew Nathan and his mother because he'd been the contractor on their house.

"How's that new place working for you?" Buster was saying to Mrs. Aldridge as Kelly Mitchell came toward the table. Mitchell was attractive and professional looking in her navy blue skirt and suit jacket. Buster didn't listen for Mrs. Aldridge's response to his question.

"Good afternoon," Ms. Mitchell said, shaking Buster's hand.

"Welcome," Buster Law said. "It's good to see the local news take an interest in education."

"Thank you," Ms. Mitchell said. She glanced at Tregan, and then his grandfather. "Have we met?"

"I'm Buster Law. I'm one of the members of the scholarship committee."

"Ah, good," she said, looking at Tregan once more. "Then perhaps you can tell us how Mr. Weaver came to be chosen as a nominee. You are Tregan Weaver?" she asked, offering to shake hands.

Tregan stood for a moment and shook her hand. "Yes, I'm Tregan," he said.

"You weren't hard to recognize," Ms. Mitchell said. "I love your hair. You don't see a lot of hairstyles like that in this part of Idaho. It would look great on camera. That's my cameraman, Ray," she said, pointing. "I'd still like to get that interview. It would only take a few minutes."

Buster Law spoke up. "We're proud of all five of our nominees. Tregan and the others were nominated by their teachers. A sharp group of kids."

"I talked to your bishop," Ms. Mitchell said to Tregan. "I asked him if he'd care to comment about your experience."

Buster Law said, "Bishops have nothing to do with the committee. This is a strictly non-religious affair. I suppose we do have two bishops on the committee, but they keep their spiritual judgments out of the selection process."

"I don't want to do an interview," Tregan said.

"You don't have to decide right now," Ms. Mitchell said. "Here's my card. We'll hang around. We can get some footage here," she said, looking around, "and if you change your mind, then we can talk."

Tregan took the card. He looked at it and handed it to his dad.

"Mr. Law," Ms. Mitchell said, "I'd love to talk to you about the

scholarship, if you don't mind. Could you come over to where my cameraman is set up?"

Buster Law caught the attention of one of the other committee members and pointed at the cameraman. "I'll be right over," he said to Ms. Mitchell.

"Don't forget about us," Ms. Mitchell said to Tregan before she walked away.

Buster Law squatted down next to Tregan. "Don't think I don't know the real reason she's here," he said, irritated. "Everyone in town knows by now."

"I don't get it," Tregan said. "If no one believes me, why is it such a big deal?"

Buster Law gave him an exasperated look. "When I saw your name on that list, I told the committee I'd have to exclude myself from the voting. The men on this committee, I've got to do business with them every day. They know me as a sensible, respectable man. But Tregan," he said, "the minute they see you up there in that hairdo, they're going to have doubts. Now add to that these stories about seeing Jesus—I don't know where you came up with that one—and bringing a reporter here? It's too much. I know these men, Tregan. They like to keep to the middle of the road. Give your speech, and don't embarrass us. It doesn't matter anyway," he said. "I could pay for your education if you'd let me."

"I know, Grandpa," Tregan said, "but I don't want you to pay for my education."

"I can see that," Buster Law said, standing up. "Just keep it short, okay? Nothing radical. Get yourself a free lunch and go home."

As Buster Law walked toward Kelly Mitchell and her cameraman, Tregan said to his dad, "What does he think I'm going to do? Do they think I'm going to start my own church?"

"I don't know," his dad said, "but this town has enough churches."

* * *

When it was Tregan's turn to speak, he said exactly what he'd planned all along—Boise State . . . anthropology major . . . emphasis in urban culture. He talked a little about what that meant, and then he sat down. As soon as the meeting was over, before Kelly Mitchell

had a chance to reach them, Tregan and his father slipped out through a back hallway that exited into the parking lot.

Riding in Tregan's CRX a few minutes later, Tregan's father started laughing.

"What's so funny?" Tregan asked.

"Besides your grandpa and that news lady, you mean?"

Tregan smiled. "Sure," he said.

"You stood up there, and I swear you could have heard a pin drop. I don't know what people expected you to say, but you sure had their attention." He laughed again. "Those other kids," he said, "they barely spit out their speeches. That one girl didn't even know what she wanted to major in. Then you started talking about your studies. You sounded like you'd already been to college. If you don't get that scholarship, everyone in that room will know why. And that camera guy got it all on tape."

Tregan didn't understand it. No one had paid any attention to him before, and now that they were, he didn't like it. He kept going over the night of the concert in his mind. It was so vivid he could close his eyes and see the hitchhiker standing there looking like Jesus in all the pictures he'd ever seen in his life, except he was in jeans and a T-shirt, his hair in a ponytail. When Jesus got in the car, Tregan didn't say anything. He just started driving. He glanced over a couple of times, but Jesus was just sitting there contentedly, his hands on his knees, watching the road.

Finally Jesus said, "I haven't seen these guys in a long time. I bet it's been ten years, at least."

"You've seen them before?" Tregan asked.

"I think it was the Symphony of Destruction tour in Boston. That was way before Dave stopped drinking, before he almost died." Dave Mustaine, Megadeth's front man, had once been in Metallica, but the band had fired him because of his alcohol abuse. "You know you've got a drinking problem when you get kicked out of Metallica for drinking too much," Jesus said. "I mean, back in the '90s, people called those guys *Alcoholica*!"

Tregan nodded, barely able to believe what he was seeing, what he was hearing.

"But I hear Dave's cleaned up a lot," Jesus said, "which is good. He really is a talented person."

Tregan said, "Why are you here?"

Jesus looked at him. "You said you didn't want to go alone. I hadn't seen these guys in a long time, so I thought I'd come along. You don't mind, do you?"

"No," Tregan said, "I don't mind. I'm glad, really. It's just a little strange, that's all."

"Well, it's a strange universe," Jesus said. "Full of surprises, you know?"

"Even for you?" Tregan asked.

"Especially for me."

* * *

On the evening after the scholarship luncheon, Tregan put in a full shift at the telephone survey center where he worked as a supervisor. After work, he got in his CRX and headed home. It was nearly midnight; but even in the middle of Rexburg, the stars were visible overhead. A Nine Inch Nails song was playing on the mix CD. Tregan pressed the skip button. The next song was "Suicide Messiah" by Black Label Society. Tregan pressed the button that ejected the CD. He turned down Third South and headed up the hill.

He was on Cornell, just a few blocks from his house, when a strange sound started coming from the car. The engine sputtered and jerked a bit before stopping altogether. He coasted to the side of the road, got out, and opened the hood. A little light came on, illuminating the engine. Tregan stood there for a moment. He didn't know anything about cars. Standing in the headlight beams, he looked up the street. He shut the hood, ready to walk home. Then there were headlights on the street. Dennis Gatlin's pickup pulled up slowly. Dennis was driving, and two other guys on the football team were with him, Lonnie Chaplin and Jake Rice.

"Look who it is," Gatlin said. "It's Mr. Goth-to-God." He threw the gear shifter into park and came around the truck while the other two boys got out on the passenger side. Tregan backed up a pace. "We were talking about you tonight," Gatlin said, "over at Jake's house. His dad says all these stories you've been telling are blasphemy."

"I need to get home," Tregan said, trying to walk past them.

Jake Rice stood aside, but Chaplin stood his ground and

Gatlin stepped into Tregan's way. "I told Jake's dad it was mocking the prophets," Gatlin said.

"Let's go," Rice said. "Leave him alone."

"Don't you get it?" Gatlin said. "This guy never did belong in this town."

"Gatlin," Rice said, "haven't you ever heard of 'Do unto others'?"

"I remember in the fourth grade," Chaplin said, "when he wore those same skateboard pants for a month straight, and he smelled like it, too. Remember that, Weaver?" Chaplin said. He pushed Tregan on one shoulder. "Didn't your dad ever wash your clothes?" he asked, poking Tregan in the chest. "Weaver, Weaver, stinky beaver," he said.

"Let's get out of here," Rice said.

Tregan brushed past Chaplin. He went past Gatlin and was almost clear of them when Gatlin grabbed him by his long hair and jerked him back. "Gonna go wash your pretty hair?" Gatlin said.

Tregan spun around instinctively, knocking Gatlin's hand off so fast that he hit him sharply across the mouth.

"Ooh, look out!" Chaplin said as he and Rice stepped back. They both looked at Gatlin, waiting for his reaction. Gatlin touched his mouth for a moment.

"I think that was on purpose," Chaplin said.

Without a word, Gatlin stepped forward and shoved Tregan against his car. "You know what, Weaver?" he said, his voice almost a hiss. "I don't care what you saw. I never liked your long-haired, gothic ass in the first place." With that, he landed a punch in Tregan's gut, bringing Tregan to his knees. Rice stood back, but Chaplin joined in, throwing punches and kicks until Tregan was curled up by the left front tire of the car. Then a spotlight flashed across all of them.

"Crap, you guys," Rice said, "it's the cops."

Gatlin and Chaplin looked up. "Let's go," Gatlin said.

As his truck sped off, Tregan heard a quick blast of the police car's siren and saw the flashing lights.

The police car stopped next to Tregan, its big engine idling loudly. An officer got out. "What's the matter, Bud?" he asked, kneeling beside Tregan in the street.

"I'm fine," Tregan said. He was waving his arm awkwardly in the direction where Gatlin had sped off.

"They were laying into you pretty good," the officer said. "What did you do to make them so mad?"

"It was Gatlin, Dennis Gatlin," Tregan said.

"I know who it was," the officer said. "I talked to them on Main Street a few minutes ago. I know their parents, too. They're not going anywhere." He took Tregan's hand as Tregan got to his feet. He shone his flashlight in Tregan's face. "That eye looks pretty nasty," he said. "Maybe we'd better run you to the emergency room."

The police car's siren had awakened the neighbors, and the red and blue lights were flashing on all the houses up and down the street. By the time Tregan was on his feet, several porchlights had come on. Tregan saw silhouettes and flashes of familiar faces on the steps and in the windows as the officer helped him into the police car. The faces watched, unmoved, until the police car drove off with Tregan inside.

* * *

On the night of the concert, just before the show started, Tregan and Jesus were sitting in the Idaho Falls Civic Auditorium talking about what was wrong with the music business. No one around seemed to notice anything unusual. They looked like a couple of average Idaho Megadeth fans: one an old fan remembering the band's glory days, the other a goth kid getting to know one of heavy metal's major taproots.

"But that's a problem with the music scene," Jesus was saying. He was sitting back in his seat, relaxed, his head cocked, talking to Tregan. "Most of the guys in the bands have good hearts," he said. "They love the music, and that's what got them started. But it's the money that corrupts them—that and all the excess, the drugs and sex. The whole system is rotten, really," he said. "It's too bad. It doesn't have to be that way." Just then, Jesus looked Tregan in the eye for a moment, and Tregan held his gaze there. Tregan felt himself coming alive in that gaze. He wanted to cry, and he wanted to burst into wild and holy laughter. He wanted to sit in silence, and he wanted to shout. He breathed in that look until he couldn't stand it any more, until the rush inside of him became so

intense that he simply had to turn away. He sat back, euphoric, looking blankly at the empty stage and the people filling the hall. It was too much to look too long.

Seeing Tregan's reaction, Jesus smiled knowingly. "Life's a big thing," he said.

"It's a good thing," Tregan said, inspired.

Then the house lights went down. "Here we go," Jesus said, clapping. "Are you ready?"

Tregan watched the darkened stage, full of anticipation, ready to take in everything and let it wash him through.

A booming voice came over the loudspeakers: "All right, southeastern Idaho, please welcome the metal monsters, Megadeth!" Everything went black. The only sound was the hushed murmur of the crowd. For an instant, Tregan thought it all might be a dream. For a split second, he thought he might suddenly awake to something that was not this moment.

Then the opening chords of "Holy Wars" blasted out of the sound system, flooding the hall with a massive wave of harmonic distortion. A blinding flash of white light appeared, followed by a warm glow of colors that illuminated the entire stage—reds, greens, purples. And there was Dave at the center of it all, his black and white Charvel Jackson Flying V hanging stylishly below his waist. He was leaning back, his mane of blond hair passing over his shoulders, his fingers shredding through a dozen power chords at breakneck speed.

Tregan called out, "Whoa!" and burst into laughter. In a moment, the whole crowd was on its feet, waving fists, punching the air in unison to the driving beat, the whole hall one with the sound itself.

Dave Mustaine was in jeans, an unbuttoned flannel shirt over a Grateful Dead T-shirt, and big white basketball shoes. At stage right, Chris, the band's new lead guitarist, was playing his seven-string Ibanez, shadowing Dave's chords and throwing in a few extra licks to boot. He was in a glittering black shirt that was unbuttoned halfway down the chest in classic rock and roll style. James, in jeans and a plain black T-shirt, and Shawn, wearing only a pair of basketball shorts, were pounding out a solid backbeat of bass and drums, holding together what would have otherwise been complete chaos.

Tregan looked over at Jesus. He was standing there, arms folded casually over his chest, nodding slightly to the beat, a modest head-banger. Tregan looked back at the stage and began to see it all anew. The four musicians were there, masters in their field, their instruments shining, perfect tools; the lights were swirling and flashing in unison with the music; and then there was that wall of flawlessly balanced sound, chaotic and symphonic at once. It was like nothing Tregan had ever known.

Later in the concert, the band launched into “A Tout le Monde,” a song about a man saying goodbye to the world at the end of his life. Jesus leaned over to Tregan and shouted over the sound of the music. “Dave wrote this song during a really bad time in his life. I think playing the guitar was the only thing that got him through.”

Then, inspired, Tregan touched the sleeve of Jesus’s T-shirt. Looking at the stage, at the audience, at the building around him, Tregan sensed the pain of the world, more hurtful than anything he’d ever known, as it mingled with a joy that was almost too great to bear.

* * *

After taking Tregan to the emergency room, the policeman called his dad, who brought him home. The next morning, his dad came into his room, waking him up. “Hey,” he said, shaking him, “there’s someone out here to see you.” A few minutes later, Tregan came out of his room in baggy shorts and a T-shirt. He had a black eye and a bandage on his forehead. Bishop Grant was sitting on the couch talking to his father about the city’s plan for repaving the streets. Chuck Grant was a tall, soft-spoken man in his fifties with a thinning head of reddish-brown hair. Tregan and his dad had known the bishop for five years, since before he was called. They spoke in the grocery store or on the street, but the bishop was good to not make a nuisance of himself. When he saw Tregan, he stood to shake his hand. “Looks like you got kinda banged up,” he said with a deadpan expression. He sat down, regarding Tregan for a moment. “Brother Sylvester, the officer who picked you up last night, he gave me a call. I’ll have a talk to the bishops of the other boys, too. That TV newswoman calls me ev-

ery day, and she's already called this morning. Somehow she heard about this little scuffle. She said it's very newsworthy."

"She called here twice," Tregan's father said. "I unplugged the phone." Then, turning to the bishop, he said, "You know what I think? If Tregan says he saw something, I believe him."

The bishop looked at Tregan. "Your dad believes you," he said.

"My dad's a good guy," Tregan said.

The bishop nodded. Then he said, "You told people you saw the Savior?"

"I told one person," Tregan said. At that moment, he remembered something about that night, something he should have remembered before he talked to Matt.

"And all this hubbub started from that?"

Tregan nodded.

"And you told him that the Savior went with you to . . ."

"To the Megadeth concert in Idaho Falls."

"And they're a rock band?"

"Yeah," Tregan said.

The bishop nodded, taking it in. "Anything else? Any other visitations or revelations?"

"That's it," Tregan said.

The bishop nodded again, slowly, thinking it through. Then he said, "I'd like for you and me to do something. I'd like for us to call this TV newswoman so we can put this whole thing to rest."

Tregan had no particular reason to agree. He had no particular reason to disagree, either. But there was something about the bishop that reminded Tregan of Jesus. It was a hint of divinity he had not seen in anyone before the night of the concert. Now he was seeing it in everyone.

That afternoon Tregan was at the News Channel 12 studios in Rexburg. The bishop had explained that the Church's public relations policy forbade him to go on-camera without permission from Salt Lake. He said the rule was designed to protect the Church from bishops who might want to go off half-cocked.

Ms. Mitchell told Tregan she was sorry he had gotten hurt but that it often took that sort of thing to raise public awareness. She asked Tregan to sit with her at a small round table with a big News Channel 12 logo behind them. She was in a teal suit dress with big white buttons down the front, and Tregan was in the same slacks

and tie he had worn to the scholarship luncheon. Ms. Mitchell asked Ray, the cameraman, to get a good shot of the length of Tregan's hair during the interview.

The bishop and Tregan's father were standing behind the cameraman. Tregan's grandfather was there, too. Ms. Mitchell had invited him to represent the scholarship committee. Ray silently counted down from three and pointed to Ms. Mitchell.

Looking at the camera, she said, "With Mormon fundamentalists on the national news, churches being burned, and religious freedom challenged all over the world, we in southeastern Idaho may not be aware that persecution can happen right here in our own backyards. Today I'm talking with Tregan Weaver, a Rexburg youth with a very interesting story to tell. Tregan," she said, turning to him, "could you tell us what happened last night and why it happened?"

The cameraman turned to Tregan. "I got beat up," Tregan said.

"Yes," Ms. Mitchell said, "and why were you beaten up?"

"Because of a story that spread around town."

"What story was that?"

"About something that happened at a concert."

"What happened?" Ms. Mitchell asked, glancing at her note cards.

Tregan looked at the bishop. Then he said, "Nothing. I mean, nothing unusual."

"I see, and . . ." Ms. Mitchell stopped. She looked up from her cards. "What's that?" she asked.

"Nothing unusual happened at the concert."

"Mr. Weaver," Kelly Mitchell said, "you reported to your friends that you had a supernatural visitation that night."

"That didn't happen," Tregan said. "I made it up."

Ms. Mitchell looked at Tregan and furrowed her brow. "I've interviewed three high school students," she said, "who say you gave them a detailed account of seeing a supernatural being beside the road."

"It didn't really happen," Tregan said. "I'm sorry."

Kelly Mitchell waved vaguely at Ray. "Okay, hold it, Ray," she said. "Cut the camera." Turning on Tregan, she said, "A dozen

people told me you saw Jesus, and he went to the Megadeth concert with you!"

"I'm sorry," Tregan said.

"But you did get beaten up, didn't you?" she asked. "Because of the story?"

Tregan nodded.

"Okay, then," Ms. Mitchell said, "we'll go back to that." She looked at Tregan, and then the men behind the camera. "Something's going on here," she said. "If there's a conspiracy between the city and the Church, I'll uncover it. Ray, roll the camera."

When Ray gave the cue, she said, "Good afternoon. I'm here in Rexburg with Tregan Weaver, a young man with a very interesting story to tell. Tregan, some reports have indicated that you were visited by a supernatural being. Is that true?"

"No, that's not true," Tregan said.

"How do you suppose these stories get started?" Ms. Mitchell asked.

"I guess people make them up," Tregan said.

"And did this alleged story result in an attack on you personally?"

"I got beat up. I didn't see who it was."

"So," Ms. Mitchell said, "with all the stories we're hearing about radicalism and intolerance, do you have any advice for those who might want to hurt others for what they believe?"

"People should try to understand each other," Tregan said, "before someone gets hurt."

Ms. Mitchell turned to the camera. "There you have it. Good advice. People should try to understand before they try to hurt. Kelly Mitchell, reporting in Rexburg, for News Channel 12."

The thing Tregan remembered about the night of the concert was something that had happened on the way home. When Tregan had dropped off Jesus, Jesus had gotten out of the car and leaned in through the window. "It was a good night," he said. "Thanks for inviting me." Then he said, "One thing, though, don't tell anyone about this, okay? It'll just cause trouble, you know?"

Tregan nodded, and Jesus walked toward the cattle pasture. In the dim light, Tregan saw the cattle in the field slowly lope toward Jesus as he came to the fence.

* * *

That night Tregan and his grandfather were both on the TV news. Tregan said the story of seeing Jesus was a lie, and Buster Law said that Rexburg didn't have a problem with radicalism and intolerance. Since Tregan decided not to press charges, Gatlin, Rice, and Chaplin weren't on the news that night. The next morning, the Madison Education Association notified Tregan that he'd won the scholarship. They told him they were disappointed that he'd briefly cast Rexburg in a bad light, but he was the most qualified candidate, and they hoped he'd learned his lesson.

A few nights later, Tregan drove out to Yellowstone Highway, just west of Rigby. He drove to the spot where he'd dropped off Jesus, and Jesus was there, waiting for him, walking toward him down the middle of the road. He was in the same clothes—jeans, a white T-shirt, and sandals. His hair was down, and he looked just like he did in all the pictures. Standing there now in the middle of the road, Jesus waited in the headlights for Tregan to bring the CRX to a stop. The highway was deserted, and the stars overhead were bright. Tregan killed the engine, and Jesus came to the window and squatted down, one hand on the car door.

Jesus looked at Tregan, smiling for a moment before he spoke. "How are you holding up?" he asked.

"Good enough, I guess," Tregan said. "I got roughed up by a couple of dorks."

"It happens too much," Jesus said. Then he said, "I told you not to tell anyone."

"Bishop Grant said he believed me," Tregan said. "It was his idea, you know, about me lying to that lady on TV."

"It's okay," Jesus said. "What do they call that, a *noble* lie? I never really liked that expression."

"I don't care," Tregan said. "They can all think what they want. And what the heck, I got the scholarship, right?"

"This is why I can't go out," Jesus said. "Bad things happen to the people I care about."

"If you come again," Tregan said, "I'll keep it to myself."

Jesus nodded, looking at the empty highway before him. Then he said, "Would you like me to come again?"

Tregan thought about it for a long time. Somehow he knew Je-

sus wouldn't mind whether he answered yes or no. He knew he'd understand either way. Then he said, "Give me a little while, and yeah, that would be great."

"I'll do what I can," Jesus said. "Who knows? I might need a friend sometime."

"That would be good," Tregan said. "Let me know."

Jesus reached out to shake hands. Tregan took his hand and shook it. A feeling came over him, as big and joyful and painful as every Megadeth song combined—even more. Tregan held Jesus's hand there under the stars for as long as he could stand it, knowing that from this moment, nothing would ever be the same.