

"Here is the news: - The situation in the Middle East continues to pose grave problems for the maintenance of world peace. The Israeli military government has responded to the ultimatum issued by the Soviet leader, Marshall Kirov, by launching a third nuclear device from its Dead Sea facilities. It is an indication of the growing desperation of the new government that this launch was apparently conceived as a tactical rather than a strategical deployment. Unlike the earlier missile launches, which wiped out the cities of Teheran and Baku on the Caspian Sea and which caused over eight million dead and unspecified injured, this launch was aimed directly at the advancing columns of the Jihad Alliance armies converging on Damascus.

A strange consequence of this latest nuclear attack has been the diversion of the waters of the Euphrates river - thereby fulfilling an obscure biblical prophecy, which some Christian fundamentalist sects claim to be a sign of an impending invasion by millions of troops from the north. Regardless of biblical overtones, there would appear to have little or no effect on the Moslem forces. Earlier reports place them within the suburbs of the former Syrian capital and heavy fighting has been reported. Meanwhile in Israel, it has been confirmed that the believed bloodless coup has resulted in the deaths of Mrs. Aleysha Ezernitz and most of her coalition cabinet. At the time of the coup, the Israeli cabinet was in emergency session and it is believed that some of the more radical of its members tried to resist the military.

Major towns and cities are being evacuated throughout Israel as a wave of fear grips the population. Israel is faced with the possibility of a nuclear strike in retaliation from the Soviet Union. At this time, the Soviets have confined their response to the Israeli attack on Baku, to reinforcing the Jihad armies with men and weapons.

Egypt is mobilising, having earlier today declared war on the new military government in Jerusalem. Most other Arab states, who have thus far held aloof from the more extremist elements of the Jihad Alliance, are also reported to be mobilising.

Here is a further item of news.....

It has just been confirmed from U.S. sources that the Soviet Union has made a nuclear response against the state of Israel....

I will repeat that item....

The Soviet Union has made a nuclear response against the state of Israel.... There is no immediate indication of U.S. reaction.

American sources report the detonation of a medium yield nuclear device, believed dropped by a Soviet bomber upon the Dead Sea missile launch facilities. In a somewhat poetic vein, considering the gravity of the news, the announcement likens the result to that of an empty eye socket. The saline waters of the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on the earth's surface, have been totally evaporated. The nuclear plant, which doubled as the Israeli launch site, has been completely destroyed.

First reactions from the United States have been cautious, being confined to expressions of regret and an appeal for the end to the further escalation of the crisis.

Meanwhile in Europe, the NATO armies and those of the Warsaw

Pact, face each other across the Iron Curtain. Populations close to the borders and from the cities are fleeing from the potential battle areas. Europe is in chaos with roads choked. Traffic, both military and civilian, is at a standstill.

More news as it comes to hand

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"The same news bulletin was heard by June Meredith under very different circumstances. A lot had happened during the day that had followed the departure of Carl Steinbecker and the other Apostolics from the city church.

There had been little sleep for her that night and the dawn had found her still staring up at the ceiling of the bedroom. The alarm had sounded as if it was any other day in the lives of the Merediths. Bob had risen without a word and she heard him splashing around in the bathroom before she reluctantly joined into the normal routine.

She wondered how long the pretence at normality would continue. Bob said nothing to her as he joined her in the kitchen for breakfast but that was not unusual. Politeness, even to the extent of bidding each other good morning, had long since departed from out of their marriage. Bob took her for granted, as if he had purchased her when they had married and she was now a possession. It had been the same with the birth of Darren, at first, the achievement of fathering a child had created pride in her husband but now, Darren was the collecting point for a lot of Bob's ill humour.

Things were not quite the same as usual, she felt Bob's eyes on her as he ate the food placed in front of him. She chose to avoid his gaze.

"You're not eating?"

"I'll eat with Darren."

She was glad that he didn't argue, she was also glad when he left the house to go to his work place. Before he went, he had something to say.

"I expect to find you here when I come home, understood? Don't think you can creep off after that fancy priest boyfriend of yours. If I have to follow you, it will go very badly for you and him! I won't stand for any funny business, you'd better get that into your head - "

Her answer was low and calm.

"Don't worry, Bob - your prize possessions will still be waiting for you when you come home. You've condemned me and our son by what you did last night. I won't go after Carl, I wouldn't have any idea where I could find him even if I wanted to - so set your mind at rest and pretend that today is going to be like any other day!"

For a moment, she thought she might have goaded him too far, his face darkened and she was well aware that he wasn't beyond striking her if he was pushed beyond a certain limit. She waited for the blow calmly, it would teach her to keep her tongue under control. He had swung on his heel and stormed out of the house and as his car roared off along the street, she let out her breath very slowly and sat herself on one of the kitchen chairs.

She went about her normal routine mechanically, the trouble was that she didn't know what to expect. Her parents had resurrected. It had taken her some time to come to terms with that on the previous day. She had attended the meeting at the church on the previous evening, making an excuse to Bob that she had to take Darren to the doctor. She had made up her mind to go with Carl, even after listening to the chatter that had followed Carl's leaving

the church premises. Some had argued that Carl was wrong and others had declared that they had no intention of leaving everything to be picked over by looters, even if things did go the way that Carl had predicted.

She had debated whether to tell Bob and had decided not to do so. He had been even more surly than usual and it would have been senseless to try to argue with him. She was sure that he would have tried to stop her. She had left the house quietly but not quietly enough, Bob had seen her go and had followed, to arrive only a few minutes after she had joined the rest of the Apostolics in front of the church. The shame of what followed caused her to mishandle a dish. It shattered and she stared at the pieces on the kitchen floor. Darren chose that moment to come for his breakfast and found himself clutched to his mother's breast in a very uncomfortable and emotional embrace. It was more than a twelve year old could take, he wriggled free.

"What was that for, Mum?" he protested.

"Do I have to make an appointment to hug you these days?"

She tried to keep her voice light but it wasn't easy, there was a feeling of panic that wouldn't go away. She went on.

"I don't think it would be a good idea to go to school today - "

She wasn't quite ready for the objection.

"Oh! Mum - It's a special assignment day - I told you, The class is

going into the Science Museum - I want to go - I've got to go - "

The panic rose stronger in her - there was no way that she could allow her son to go into the heart of the city on this day - especially on this day.

"You'll do as I say, Darren - no school, no trip and you'll stay close to the house - understood?"

The protests continued in an increasing crescendo and culminated in a screaming match. The boy was frightened of his father but not above using him as a role model when it came to abusing his mother. She ended up by striking him across the mouth and was momentarily frightened when she saw the fury in the boy's eyes. A few more months, a year maybe, and he wouldn't take that kind of treatment anymore and she could expect retaliation. He slammed out of the room without his breakfast and she heard a series of house doors crash closed as he went back to his bedroom - at least he had obeyed and it wasn't an outside door.

She was shaking as she sat down on one of the kitchen chairs. The breakfast dishes remained uncleared. It wasn't a time for house chores, it was a time to think and to plan and to make decisions. It wasn't long before she had an unexpected visitor. At first, she thought it might be Bob returning to check on her and she braced herself for another tirade of abuse.

Bitterly she thought to herself, she was only thirty three years of age and already her life was a parody of what she had hoped. Now she dreaded the appearance of the man she had loved so wildly that she had gone against her parents pleading to marry. Her parents were gone, no longer the refuge

to whom she could run. She had no refuge - not even God.

The knock was at the front door, for a moment she sat immobilised. It could have been one of the neighbours, although that wasn't likely. One thing was for sure, it wasn't her husband - he would have burst in through the kitchen door. It was always possible that it was an unwelcome door to door salesman, or a religious doctrine peddler - that was the way she viewed those who called from door to door and that included New Apostolics. She had never agreed with door knocking.

Reluctantly she got to her feet when the knock was repeated, a little louder the second time. Darren was sulking in his room and would more than likely stay there until he had cooled off. She approached the door carefully. Though the beaten glass, she could see that it was a male figure, this prompted her to a greater caution. She opened the door a crack and then wider in relief when she recognised her cousin.

David Johnstone stared at her mutely, she beckoned him to enter, saying nothing. She led the way back to the kitchen. Without asking, she poured him a cup of tea and then sat opposite him across the table.

"This was how I talked to Carl when I found that Mum and Dad were gone - across the table, but he made the coffee."

She watched David stir his tea. Her cousin was a handsome young man, very like his father who had married her mother's sister.

"I saw what Bob did to you at the church," he began. "I wondered how it was with you - "

"Good of you to take the trouble considering the situation - every man for himself!"

"We're still family, June!"

She didn't respond to the reproach. It wasn't much good calling on family ties, the two halves of the family had never been really close.

"I suppose your parents were taken?"

The young Deacon nodded reluctantly.

"I was the one left behind - "

There was a further silence - then:

"What do you intend to do, June?"

She shrugged.

"That seems to depend on Bob - he's calling the shots."

She tried to keep the bitterness out of her voice.

"Why didn't you go with the rest, David. Wasn't Carl persuasive enough?"

He hesitated before answering.

"I didn't altogether agree with his interpretation of Chapter Twelve - "

She waited, Carl had made it clear cut enough for her.

"I didn't agree when he said that those who didn't go with him would join the ranks of the Remnant of the Seed. We are Sealed with the Holy Spirit and we were told often enough that those who were Sealed had a different destiny to those who were not. Our end can't be the same as those who simply kept the commandments and gave testimony of their acceptance of the Christian ideal. I believe we have a place in the Wilderness too and that God will make provision for us. After all, those who went with Carl are only a small portion of the Woman, there must be hundreds, maybe thousands of arrangements that God is making to fulfil bringing her to a place of safety!"

The words had gathered strength as he went on, like a torrent that had found its way through a dam. She stared at him with gathering hope.

"Do you really think its going to be that way, David!"

"Let's just say that I don't think Carl Steinbecker has got the sole agency for taking care of the Woman Clothed with the Sun!"

They argued the concept through, over and over. David was very persuasive, finally he convinced her that there was going to be another way made available to them. When he had finished, he stared at her wide eyed and flushed with his own conviction, waiting for her to say something. The excitement faded in her as she faced the inevitable question.

"What am I to do about Bob?"

David's answer was characteristically offhand.

"You owe him nothing! He's treated you pretty badly from all accounts, he doesn't deserve any consideration - No, don't argue, look at it this way, he isn't Sealed with the Holy Spirit, so his destiny has to be different to yours. You go one way, he has to go another. June, we were told often enough that the Day of the First Resurrection would affect everybody on earth and in eternity. It would be a day of joy for those taken, but it would be a day of dissolution for those left and that we couldn't expect to hang on to all that we had gained materially while we neglected the spiritual - that goes for relationships between those who were Children of God and those who were not - including husband and wife relationships!"

June was very silent for a while. David waited with gathering impatience. Finally she answered.

"Does that go for Darren too? - He was never Sealed, Bob wouldn't allow it." David stared at her and groped for an answer.

"In Corinthians somewhere, it says that a believing wife should stay with an unbelieving husband for the sake of the children, so that she could be a blessing for them - "

"That's a contradiction on what you've just said - if you are right, you've given me my answer. I stay, although God knows that I was never a real believing wife - "

David took his spoon and stirred his almost empty cup absently.

"And what will you do," she asked him.

"I'm going to find some sort of shelter but not too far - I want to see what happens."

She was genuinely curious.

"How far is - not too far?"

"A hundred kilometres, perhaps - it should be far enough."

"What about the radiation?"

"You're assuming that something is going to happen. Carl Steinbecker and people like him are going to look pretty stupid when they have to make their way back to the city after nothing happens. I want to be around to protect what is mine."

"Against what - just supposing nothing happens?"

"Law and order is bound to break down - you should see the queues of cars trying to get out of the city, that means that there'll be those left behind who'll take over what's abandoned. Not everyone believes there's going to be a nuclear war. A lot of people are pointing at America showing a lot of restraint, even if the Russians were to use the bomb on Israel. The U.S. is in a no win situation, they can't condemn Israel but on the other end, they can't defend the indefensible."

"Don't let us talk politics, David," She interrupted wearily. "You're supposed to be a Deacon and you don't believe that a destruction is about to happen, just as scripture says, after the First Resurrection? Well, I do believe it and I want to know what I have to do to protect myself and particularly Darren." David stopped his stirring and set down the spoon deliberately.

"I was only saying what I heard from a lot of people," he defended. "All right, let's say the destruction is going to happen, obviously the only thing to do is to get out of the city or hide within the city - some sort of shelter. By the look of the roads, no one is going to get very far that way. All the small craft in the harbour have gone - I suppose they are on their way along the coast."

That leaves staying in the city and finding shelter - "

She persisted.

"What sort of shelter?"

"I don't know - somewhere strong and deep I suppose. Some of the buildings in the city are rated as nuclear shelters but you could bet on it that they will be earmarked for those who are more important than the rest of us - "

"There must be other places - "

"The underground railway, sewers perhaps, although they might not be deep enough. It would have to be somewhere were a near miss wouldn't bury you alive. A direct hit wouldn't matter - you wouldn't know anything about it!" The kitchen door burst open and they stared at the new arrival like conspirators. Bob glowered at his wife's visitor.

"I thought you'd be up to something when my back was turned! Still running after your church cronies?"

"It's nothing like that, Bob - David dropped by, that's all - He didn't go with Carl either - "

Bob Meredith searched the slim figure of his wife's cousin. David had risen to his feet slowly and stood facing him.

"So, what do you want? Let's just say that you're not welcome in my home, Say what you have to say and then get out!"

"My husband has always been noted for his hospitable nature," June interjected. "Take no notice of him, David - you might have come uninvited but now I invite you to stay!"

It was the first time that she had directly challenged him, taking courage from the fact that a third party was present. Truthfully, it was for herself that she wanted David to stay, she was frightened of what Bob could and would do as the circumstances developed. The stand off was broken by the arrival of the son of the house. The kitchen door was thrown open.

"Dad! Do you know what she made me do? She made me stay home and wouldn't let me go with my class to the city."

Bob stared at his son. June waited for the outburst that was already overdue. It didn't eventuate.

"I suppose you mean your mother? Well, for once, she seems to have done the right thing. The city is no place to be today - everybody seems to have gone mad! I've come home because there's no business to run. The boss has gone missing and so have the other executives. The staff is working on the basis of every man for himself. The roads are choked. The trains have stopped because no one will drive them. It's only a matter of time before the power and other utilities are shut down - it looks bad! - "

June stared hard at her husband.

"And you stopped Darren and me from going to safety."

"I stopped you from running after your old boyfriend!"

David intervened before another brawl developed.

"Bob, I've been telling June that we all ought to find somewhere deep and bomb proof for the next few hours - just in case something happens - if nothing does, we'll be close enough to home to protect it against looters - "

Bob nodded curtly.

"I had the same idea - that's why I came back - to look after June and Darren - not to run out and look after just myself!"

The display of marital consideration was not very convincing. June let the comment pass.

"Pack some food and clothing and we'll head for the railway - "

David looked to be included in the arrangements. Hastily, they gathered together some essentials - food, clothing and bed rolls from their camping gear. It was with a feeling of finality that June locked the house behind them. It was a fruitless exercise because by the time they returned, it would either be destroyed, or if it survived or there was no destruction, it would be broken open and looted.

The streets were very quiet, it was already the middle of the morning but it was as if all the houses were deserted and lifeless, standing like ghosts to farewell them into the depths of the earth. There were more people about when they came to the nearest rail station.

"The line is about two hundred meters deep at this point." Bob stated.

June looked at him, he sounded almost cheerful, as if it was the beginning of one of their dreaded camping holidays, which always ended in some disaster.

The trickle of humanity seeking the shelter of the station complex was increasing steadily, soon it would become a flood and dangerous, as fear took a hold. The formalities of obtaining tickets had long since been abandoned and so they descended without hindrance to the platform levels, finding them already crowded. They were assured that the trains were stopped for the duration of the crisis and that the tunnels were safe, and so they found a spot not far from the platform, where they could hear the broadcasts on someone's transistor radio. It was there that they listened to the same broadcast, late in the night, which Carl heard in his car on Highway Twenty.