

Darkness Risen

-The Torchier-



Richard Shekari

Darkness Risen

-The Torcher-

By

Richard Shekari

Copyright 2016 Richard Shekari

Thank you for downloading this e-book. This book remains the copyrighted property of the author, and may not be redistributed to others for commercial or non-commercial purposes.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, events and incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. Thank you for your support.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Dedication

Chapter One: Ablaze.

Chapter Two: Natural Barrier.

Chapter Three: A Glimpse of Hope.

Chapter Four: The Safe House.

Acknowledgments

Ayiwulu Alaku

Peter Barwa

George Shekari

Dedication
For the Surmounters

Chapter One: Ablaze

“Well, what do we have here?” whispered Jeffery, closing his left eye as he tried to maintain his gaze with the right eye through the microscope. He adjusted the small fine focus knob until the specimen was clearly in focus. He then set the diaphragm to get the best lighting.

“Boo!” yelled a loud female voice from behind him.

“Jesus, Karen!” said Jeffery, “You scared the bit jeez out’o me.”

“We come in peace!” hissing, she grabbed him gently by the neck, “I told you I’ll get you someday.” She ran her finger through his hair. “Whatchu got in there?”

“Uh, nothing.” he answered, smiling. “Just this tissue Doctor Melanie wanted me to analyse. It’s unlike anything I’ve ever seen. Hmm! Weird!” he picked a small book and scribbled some lines.

“Thanks for the dinner the other day!” she said.

“Oh, it was nothing!” he said.

“No, really!” she added, “It was wonderful. I had fun that night, I haven’t gone out like that in ages!”

“You deserve better than that,” he responded. Wearing a great smile, he lifted his head. “You look great!”

“Thank you!” she said, “Guess what?”

“I’m all ears!”

“I got promoted yesterday,” she added, excitedly.

“Oh my God,” Jeffery said, Standing up. “Congratulations. Wow!” He gave her a warm hug, “Wow! I mean, this is super awesome, girl!”

“I know, right?” her dimples deepened, admiring his strong look and good skin, “I didn’t wanna text you. Wanted to tell you in person!”

She stood 5’7” before him, just about four inches short of his height.

“Wow, finally.” he said, sitting back. “I’m truly happy for you. How many years you’ve waited like two and a half years or so?”

“Four long years!” she said. “Hey Jef.” She stood there akimbo, “There’s something you must see!” She slipped her left hand down into the pocket of her lab coat and gripped a red pen tightly in her right fist.

“What is it?” he asked, out of curiosity.

“Let’s go to L6!” she added.

“Now?” asked Jeffery, taking off his glasses. “I’ve been onto this since 3:00am. Maybe when I’m done with...”

“You slept here?” she asked.

“Sort of,” he replied, “Closed 9:15pm; Went out for dinner, had a little nap and rolled back into the lab 2:40am.”

“Jeez, Jef!” she said, “Don’t overwork yourself!”

“I need to get this done before 10:00am,” he said, “Doctor Melanie said she’d...”

“I’ve got this thing I wanna show you!” Karen interjected, gazing into his eyes. “You’ve really got to see this. Trust me when I say; you wouldn’t miss it for the world!”

“Could you please give me twenty minutes!” he pleaded, “Is it another...”

“Nope!” she interposed, “This is unlike anything you’ve ever seen in your wildest imagination!”

“Oookay!” he responded, lustfully. Staring at her thick, glossy lips, “What is it?”

“Come with me!” she said.

Jeffery closed the book on his desk, placing his glasses on it as he loathly followed her.

“You smell good too,” he said with a smile on his face.

“Thank you, Jef!” she sighed, “It’s the same perfume I wear every day.” She turned and winked as she chewed her bubble-gum. “Thanks for noticing...today! Smelling nice yourself!”

He smiled and turned his eyes away from her gaze.

“Jef! Jef! Jef!” she hollered. “Always diffident when complimented!” she teased, “So, how’s your girlfriend?”

“I can’t remember ever telling anyone I’ve got a girl...friend” he replied, meekly.

“Hmm!” she responded, “Am I intruding or are you in denial?” She pressed down the hall button of an elevator.

“I’m not dating anyone.” Jeffery said. He smiled back at her, “For now, that is!”

Jeffery stood behind her as they await the elevator cab to descend.

“I know,” she said. “Work! Work! Work! That’s all you know.” Karen shook her head, “Veronica has been trying to get your attention lately...And so does Chloe!”

With her hands in the pockets of her lab coat, still chewing her gum, she left her hips exposed to the delight of his sight.

Jeffery stole some moments to admire her body.

“Observing anything, handsome?” she said as she caught his eyes staring at her hips, “Do you need a microscope, Jef?” she teased, as she smiled seductively.

He sighed.

“You don’t ever part with that necklace, do you?” she remarked, turning her face away from him.

“It’s a gift from my mum,” he said, “It was given to her by an old friend during her trip to Africa in the ’80s. She handed it to me about a month before she passed on!”

“You must’ve missed her!” she said.

“A lot!” he responded, “She meant the world to me!” his face gleamed with a smile.

“Hmm! Good morning!” she said.

“What?”

“We forgot to say ‘good morning’ this morning!” she said, “So I say good morning!”

“Oh, yeah!” he grinned, “Good morning!”

“The day’s still young!” Karen said, looking at her wristwatch, “Urgh! 9:06am! Really?”

“What’s up?” he asked.

“Anytime you’ve got a beautiful plan for the evening, the day walks like a turtle with a giant hippo on its back!” She said.

“Hmm!” he responded, “We’ve got plan for the evening I see!” clearing his throat, “A date, I presumed?”

“Nope!” She said, “G.N.O. Homie; Girls night out!” flicking her fingers as she threw her tongue out.

“This is cool.” He said, “One of a kind!”

“What’s cool?” She asked, “My nails or the tongue?”

“The glass elevator shaft doors!” He replied, “Even though it’s scary sometimes!”

“You remember the sightings of that humanoid thingy in the east that was said to have something like fire burning within its torso?” Karen said.

“Yeah!” He responded, “The footage went viral on YouTube, ya?”

“Yup!” She exclaimed, “Thanks to camera phones, right?”

“Doctor Melanie’s daughter claimed she always sees it in her dream?” Jeffery added, “Also, I heard that the person who uploaded it online was found dead. Burnt to ashes in his apartment, on his own bed yet, not even a touch of fire on the bed sheet!”

“Hmm!” she sighed, “Weird huh? Might be SHC... Spontaneous human combustion?”

“Someone said it’s probably one of those biblical end of time stuff?” he said.

“Yeah, the biblical stories...” she snorted, “God and Satan, angels and demons, heaven and hell etcetera! Gimme a break, Jef. You don’t believe in that crap, do you?”

The doors came open.

“Well, if you’d asked me that say, three years back, I’d laugh at you and the entire tale!”

“What about now?” She asked, as she led him into the elevator.

“I do not only believe that God exists, Karen,” he said, “I believe...in God!”

“Mm hmm?” She responded, “Don’t we all, Jef?” Snapping her chewing gum, “Well, if you say so! Anyways,

back to our discussion; would you believe me, if I'd told you that something similar to one of those things from that YouTube sensational video has been discovered?" Karen swiped her keycard on a small screen, turning to Jeffery.

"Uh, what do you mean?" he said, "I get uncomfortable when you wear that look."

"*Welcome Dr Keaton.*" said the computer voice in a masculine tone, "*Destination?*"

"Level 6!" she said.

"*Level 6 Clearance-Access Granted.*" said the computer.

"I thought they said they'd changed it to a female's voice?" Jeffery said.

"Oh! You're a feminist now?" Karen remarked.

"Well, uh...!" responded Jeffery, "It's just that it's you know...Peachy and cherubic!"

"Well, I'm flattered and I've got to say..." She turned to him, "On behalf of all the women in the whole wide world, permit me to say; thank you, Jeffery Bopson!" She snapped her gum again, "By the way, you wanted to say something when we had dinner the other night. You said when we meet next you'd tell me."

“Well, I meant...I’ll surely um...” He shook his head embarrassingly, “I’ll tell you but, you know, some things are best uttered at the right time...right moment, right?”

“Right!” She said, as she turned her head away. “If you say so!” She smiled.

“Would you like me to play a love song while we descend?” The computer asked.

“No!” Karen and Jeffery said in accord.

“Command Granted!” The computer said.

Minutes later, they got off the lift and headed to the research laboratory. Karen used her access keycard once more to open its steel doors.

As they walked into the facility, Jeffery sighted a dark figure like a naked man on his feet inside an enclosure made of thick glass walls. Many electrical wires and tubes were connected to the base of the big glass box, situated in the middle of the installation.

“Is that a statue?” Jeffery asked.

“No, Jef!” she answered, “Put this on!” She handed safety goggles to him and wore one herself. Karen then

switched of the lights with a remote control, leaving them in the dark. “Let there be light!”

“Seriously?” Jeffery said. He turned to her, “You should leave this job and venture into the world of Stand-up comedy!”

“Don’t look at me, Jef. Check this out!” came her reply, pointing her finger at the dark figure in the big glass box.

As Jeffery turned, he saw fire burning on the part that seemed like the chest region of what he thought was a statue.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he said. Jeffery walked towards the glass box and placed his hands on it, “This cannot be!”

“It’s not a statue,” Karen said. “This is a living organism, Jef! Though the team hasn’t figured out a name for it yet, as for now, we all call it, ‘CD.’ As in, Charles Darwin!”

“How do you mean?” He asked. Jeffery took his time to observe the figure; he noticed how the fire that was in form of a human heart began to spread slowly through what looked like the arterial blood vessels of this entity that stood before him. The fire spread like hot lava across what appeared to be its arteries and veins, even its capillaries and lymphatic vessel

were seeable, and it stood illuminated before them. Jeffery wanted to say something but paused.

“The way you look at it, like you’ve seen it before.” She said, “Are you okay?”

Jeffery turned to Karen and opened his mouth to talk when all of a sudden, the beast grunted. Jumping from its position, it landed right in front of Jeffery with its eyes closed. The floor vibrated beneath their feet.

“Whoa!” He exclaimed and shifted back, “This thing...is alive!

“Impossible!” came her reluctant response, taking her goggles off. “But I’ve never seen it behave in such a way!” fear gripped them both.

As the beast stood tall before Jeffery, something like branchial arches came open beneath its ears and a hot steam gushed out. Jeffery observed how it slowly widened its nostrils as though perceiving something in the air around it. Its red fiery eyes became visible to them, setting its stare direfully into Jeffery’s soul. The dark beast fumed and began hitting its head repeatedly against the thick glass, trying to break free from the box as the fire in its visible heart

continued to burn and glow. It would run back and leap violently towards Jeffery.

Jeffery fell to the floor out of fear as he tried to grasp his breath.

“What the hell!” Jeffery said, his heart pounded. “This isn’t really happening?”

“Ha-Ha!” Karen laughed, walking towards the glass box, “You look scared like a little cat. It can’t get through,” she hit the glass twice with her knuckle. “See, it’s bulletproof or should I say, blast-proof! A glass wall, five inches thick. Courtesy of The Homeland Security and Tech guys!”

“Are you sure it’s blast-resistant?” He asked.

“Uh huh!” She responded, “If you’re on the other side, this baby’s thick enough to stop a woman’s feelings from getting across to you. Know what I mean?” She smiled.

“Uh, sure!” He said, shaking his head gently.

“It remained calm and quiet since they brought it here, until now!” Karen said.

“What is that...Thing!?” Jeffery asked, still panicked and on the floor.

“I have no idea,” she said. “They want us to help them find out what it is and where it came from!”

“How did it get here in the first place?” He asked again.

“The guys from upstairs!” She said, “I think its alien or maybe one of those mad scientists who got asphyxiated under the soft pillow of their own little crazy experiment!”

“Put the damn lights back on, Karen!” He said, as he stood to his feet. “The army brought this here?” He added, taking his goggles off as the lights came on, “You think it’s...Think it’s from another world?”

“Oh my God!” She laughed, “You should’ve seen the look on your face!” Karen tried to hold on to her breath, she wiped the teardrop that found its way down her left cheek.

The dark figure stood seven-feet tall before them, motionless.

“See, its calm!” She said, “Don’t be scared, baby!”

“You were struck with fear too!” He said, “This is not funny!”

“I know, right?” Karen responded, still overwhelmed with laughter.

Jeffery once again walked towards the glass box. He noticed the beast was still staring at him. It began hitting its hands on the thick glass furiously with its heart burning brightly. Sparks of fire hissed from its erratic, dark skin, setting its entire body ablaze.

Jeffery could understand that it can inhale and exhale as humans do, and the fire spread round its body like blood in a normal human circulatory system.

“I don’t think it likes you, Jef!” Karen added, she pressed the Record button on the remote control she held. “It has never reacted like this before! The guys would be amazed”

“How long has it been here?” He asked.

“Today?” She responded, looking at her wristwatch. “144 hours, 66 minutes and uh...6 seconds! There, yes!”

“Its body,” said Jeffery as he observed the figure. “Like it’s made up of...”

“Coal!” They both said in unison.

“Its body is kind of like, carbonized matter!” She added, “I literally walked into that box days back and scraped off some samples for Doctor Melanie!”

“Where did they dig this thing from?” He asked.

“I have no idea,” she replied. “Maybe Doctor Melanie can answer that!”

“Unbelievable,” Jeffery whispered. “You never told me this will happen this soon!” as though talking to himself.

“Jeffery,” Karen said. “Who are you talking to?”

“Never mind!” He said, taking a step back. “There’s something I need to tell you, Karen.”

“Oh, seriously? Now?” She said, “We had a perfectly good time the other night and you didn’t care to say anything, until now that this thing came to life? Oh how great, Jef!”

“It’s not what you think,” he said.

As Jeffery opened his mouth to talk, the beast began to roar, striking its head once more against the thick glass, trying to break its way through as it gazed directly at the necklace hanging from Jeffery’s chest. The young man noticed a crack on the glass as he held firm the small golden cross, he took a few steps back.

“Karen! Your blast-proof glass has cracked!” He yelled, “I don’t think we’re safe down here! We should get the hell out of here!”

“I think so, too!” replied Karen. She tossed the remote control away and began walking backwards.

By the time the steel doors came open, the beast had broken free; shattering and spewing jagged pieces of glass in every direction. Karen and Jeffery ran out as the doors went shut. The beast came ramming its head on the thick steel doors.

The fire alarm came on.

“Oh God!” Karen cried, “This better be a dream!”

They both ran into the elevator, which came down just seconds after hitting the button several times.

“This is a good sign!” He said, “Imagine if it took longer than that!”

Karen swiped her keycard on the small screen, “This damn thing!” She lamented.

“Welcome Dr Keaton.” said the computer once again, *“Destination?”*

“First floor!” They both hollered.

“Voice Recognition Error!” said the computer, *“Please, say command again!”*

“First floor!” She said, enwrapping her hand around Jeffery’s mouth.

“First floor-Access Granted!” The computer said.

“We need to warn the others!” She recommended, breathing heavily. “Did you see that?”

They both laid their back against the wall laughing at each other. Panting and gazing into each other’s eyes, followed by an affectionate smile.

“Would you like me to play you a rock song?” said the computer.

“No!” They both shouted.

“Command Granted!” said the computer as a rock song pelted through the speakers from above.

“Jesus Christ!” said Karen, shaking her head. “This is perfect! Just perfect!”

The duo continued to laugh.

Jeffery took his eyes away from her and set them on the digital display above the elevator doors as they ascend. It felt as though the numbers aren’t counting. They both stared at it as though hypnotized.

Karen's senses were so high up. They just couldn't wait to get back up. Jeffery turned to gaze at her once more, she smiled fondly at him. They again turned their eyes back on the digital display.

"I'm going to have a headache!" She said, with her hands on her chest.

There was a loud bang. The elevator came to a halt and the lights went off.

"Jesus, this is not happening!" Karen said, turning to him. "What the hell just happened?"

"I think the building just lost power!"

"Great! She responded, "Just great!"

Jeffery kept pressing the buttons repeatedly, nothing happened. He pressed the emergency button to make a call but no response. He then pulled out his cell phone, it had no signal.

"Lord!" He exclaimed.

"We're about eight meters below the first floor," said Karen. "You can't get signal down here!" holding on to Jeffery's hand firmly, "The standby generators will come up, right?"

“I pray so,” he said. “What the hell was that thing, Karen?”

“Doctor Melanie called me this morning and told me we got work to do on level 6 so I thought to myself, how about I have a look at the lab before she and the rest of the guys arrived this morning.”

“But you told me it has been here for about 144 hours!” He said, “What’s going on? Where did you guys unearth that thing?”

“I don’t know,” she said with tears in her eyes as fear took over her. “The thing is; these group of experts were to show up yesterday. Oh well, we later got a call that the research has been cancelled and they intend to move the specimen down to IMRC!”

“The International Military Research Centre?” He asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “And the whole thing is classified. I only wanted to show you what’s down there...Before they show up. That’s all! I’m going to lose my job, Jef!”

“No, you won’t,” he tried to console her. “Don’t say that. I’ve got your back!” He held her in his arms.

“What am I going to do?” She asked.

A sharp blow came from beneath their feet. The car shook.

“Well, first...” he said. “We need to find a way to get the hell out of this tin can before angry ember down there gets up here and vaporise our butts!” He looked up at the car ceiling.

“Please don’t leave me,” said Karen. She tightened her grip on him.

“Let me give you a lift!” Jeffery said, “When you get up, turn that red thingy anticlockwise and push the cover up.”

“I don’t think I can do it!” She said.

“I don’t think you wanna stay here and be eaten by a living coal that pumps fire through its arteries! Trust me!” He said, “I saw fire, woman! Fire! That thing has got like gills below its ears, that jets out steam?”

“I am scared, Jef!” She said, “Are we going to die?”

“No!” He tried to reassure her, “No one is dying tonight. Not on Jehovah’s watch! We’re getting out of here! Now!”

Jeffery held her firmly below the hips and lifted her up. She followed his instruction as she steadily climbed up onto the roof of the car. He then jumped and made his way up.

“I can’t climb up there,” she cried. She looked up at the thick cables holding the car, “I can’t!” Karen shivered as she held him, gazing deep into his eyes.

“Don’t worry,” he said. Jeffery switched on the light from his cell phone, “I’ll help ya! First we have to get rid of your coat!” He assisted her, and immediately taking off the one he wore as well, as he managed to resist the temptation from her luscious lips.

Her breast pressed gently on his chest, they could hear each other’s heartbeat.

Abandoning the warmth feeling of the momentary flash of their newly found affection, on recalling the impending danger, they began to wonder how to mount their way up through the elevator shaft.

As Jeffery used his phone to light the shaft, the arm of what was chasing them burst through the floor of the car, shaking them off a bit. His phone fell down through the hatch opening. Karen and Jeffery watched as the beast used its hand violently to search the floor for their feet, it then ripped off the floor and made its way up into the car. They could see their

pursuer in the car looking up at them through the hatch, sniffing. Its weight pulled down the car, straining the cables.

Karen and Jeffery didn't think twice. They quickly began climbing up, and with a little help from him, she forged ahead.

The electric power came back on and the car began to pull up but jerked and went to a halt. The beast tore off the ceiling to climb up and the power came back on again, the car moved up a bit and came to an abrupt halt, again. Losing its grip, the beast fell down into the car and through the hole it ripped on the floor.

Karen and Jeffery continued to make their way up quickly as the cables holding the car clapped. They got to the next level, placing their feet on the small floor space on the base of the glass elevator shaft door.

“Help!” They cried out repeatedly as they hit the glass door. No one could hear them. Jeffery removed his shoes and began hitting the glass door harder. Luckily for them, the glass door made them visible to a security guard, an older man who was passing by.

The old man kept pressing the button from the other side but it did not come open, another security guard came to help.

Karen looked down below and was frightened by the size of their pursuer on top of the car, engulfed in flames, trying to make its way up.

“Oh my God, Jef!” She said, “It’s back! Hurry! Tell them to hurry!”

They could hear the sound of the cables as though they were about to snap. Her keycard fell and in coming into contact with the beast’s forehead, the keycard incinerated.

“Get the fire extinguisher!” Jeffery yelled, pointing his finger at it on the wall, behind the guards.

One of the guards went for it, and on his return, Jeffery held Karen on one side as the doors came smashing in.

“Run! Run!” Jeffery and Karen hollered at the security guards.

Putting his shoes back, Jeffery held her hand as they made their way carefully through the Shards of glass scattered on the floor and did not hesitate to run after warning the guards.

“Doctor Karen, Jef!” said one of the guards, “Calm down, it’s only a power outage, and it’s been fixed!”

“Run! It’ll kill you.” Jeffery said, “Run for your lives!”

“We grew up without electricity in my days!” said the old mocking guard, he giggled. “Modern day kids. A minute without electricity and they’ll go loco.”

“They act like they’ve seen a ghost!” remarked the other as he shrugged, “Let’s have a look!”

Laughing, the guards shone their searchlights down the elevator shaft.

As Karen and Jeffery turned, they sighted the guards trying to look down into the shaft. Jeffery and Karen shouted at them, telling them to run. Ignoring the warnings, the beast jumped and crushed the old man’s skull with its bare hand.

The second guard fell on his knees in shock as he trembled.

“Freeze or I’ll shoot!” He said, pulling out his handgun from its holster.

The beast roared down at him.

With his shaky hands and wobbly knees, the terrified young man fired multiple shots at the beast; a bullet ricocheted, hitting the guard on his kneecap. He moaned, dragging himself towards the wall. The young man put his handgun into his own mouth in fear as he cried, after

squeezing the trigger several times, he realized he ran out of bullets.

Jeffery and Karen watched as the beast angrily jumped and sniffed the panic-struck guard, it stared at him for a while but did not harm him. With the injured guard on the floor lying in-between its legs, the beast stood tall as it continued to sniff the surroundings. It turned its head towards Karen and Jeffery; on sighting them, it growled and took a step to go after them when all of a sudden, the people who heard the commotion began to come out of their offices only to come across a huge fiery creature in the hallway. It turned its attention on the people and behaved as though raking through the panic-stricken crowd as it whiffed those it laid its hands on. The beast jumped on sighting an elderly lady, and grab-hold of her head, crushing her skull and piecing her chest with its hand. All the people panicked and scattered, running for their dear lives as it ripped her heart out.

Jeffery and Karen watched all that happened before making their way up through the staircase. The sound of their footsteps was accompanied by a roar from the dark beast that shook the grounds beneath their feet.

Chapter Two: Natural Barrier.

A running Jeffery and Karen made their way out of the research facility to the parking lot. There was total chaos and commotion as dozens of panicked people run for their lives, all headed to where they believed would be a safe ground; some ran to the muster point, most struggled to enter their vehicles, others continued running on foot.

A blast ripped through the fourth floor of the facility, Jeffery and Karen witness as some individuals jumped off the windows of their own offices, gravity showed no mercy on them.

“Where’s your car, Jef?” She asked, “Where did you park?”

“Close to the entrance,” he said. Jeffery checked his pockets, “Oh God! I left the car keys on the table in the lab!” Looking at the keys in his hand.

“Gosh! Let’s go!” Karen said. She threw her car keys at him, “Follow me!”

She led him to a nearby *Disabled Person's* Parking area, where she parked her black *SUV*.

“Typical,” said Jeffery He gasped, “You never seized to amaze me!”

“I got my neighbour’s parking permit, okay!” She yelled.

“Oh for Christ sake, Karen.” He said, “You told me she died like six months ago?”

“Excuse me?!” She yelled, “At least I didn’t park my car bazillion miles away from civilisation! I used to carry her around with my car, you know that. Why do I need to explain it to you anyway?”

As Jeffery and Karen argued on their way to where she parked her car, they witnessed a horrendous phenomenon that unfolded; the sun dimmed as though blanketed by a thick cloud of darkness.

“Oh my God!” Karen said, “Jeffery! What’s...happening?”

“Get in the car!” He yelled as an extremely painfully loud, and irritating *high-pitched sound* cut through the surroundings, accompanied by terrible noises that left a whistling sound in their ears. It sent them all to the ground. Setting off almost all the car alarms in the premises.

“Get in the car!” He cried out, pressing the car remote, it didn’t work so he used the key to open the car doors. Jeffery entered and shut his door. Realising Karen wasn’t able to get in, he got out through the passenger side and found her screaming on the ground. Windshields from the nearby cars began to shatter.

“Oh my God!” She cried, “Help me! Jeffery help me!”

He managed to get himself and Karen back into the SUV through the passenger side. The sound subsided. Something began falling from the sky; solid objects were thudding terrifically against the roof of the car.

“What it is?” Karen said as she bent her head to have a good look.

“Dead Birds!” He said.

Some dead birds landed on the windshield.

“What?”

“The birds in the skies,” he said. “The sound must’ve killed them all or something.”

The rear window popped, Karen screamed. She kept calm, after realizing what happened.

While they listen to the sound of objects hitting the roof of other cars in the premises and around the surrounding, the doors to the main entrance of the research building exploded with such great force. People were still screaming as Karen and Jeffery sighted the beast making its way out of the voracious fire; its entire body visible from a distance inflicted such great terror and fear in the hearts of those who gazed upon it. A cry never heard of before wailed through the crowds who tried to make their way out of the premises. Even though covered in flame, its heart could be seen shining brightly from afar. The beast walked down the steps and seized a man by his throat, smashing him several times on the steps, and with its foot, crushed the man's skull.

The beast looked around for whom to attack.

“We need to get out of here!” She cried out.

“Sure thing!” He said, with his foot on the pedal, zooming out of the parking lot in an intolerable speed like an old racer.

The beast sighted them and roared.

“Oh my God,” Karen screamed. “I think it sees us!”

The beast ignored the ones who were frozen, struck with fear and had surrounded themselves around it. Running down to catch up with Karen and Jeffery in the SUV, a huge plane crashed on top of the beast and the frightened. A massive explosion ripped through the research facility, as the fire devoured all in its path. Many individuals were seen running with fire burning their entire body as they cried out for help.

“Oh my God!” Karen screamed again, looking back at the premises.

Jeffery had a glimpse of what had occurred via the rear-view mirror but he forged ahead with the headlamps full.

Karen returned to her seat, terrorised, strapping herself with the seatbelt as she tried to trick her mind from storing the incident anywhere in her memory.

They could see more objects engulfed in fire falling from the sky, crashing into buildings in a city immersed in total blackout.

“Where do we go?” She asked, crying with mucus running down her nostrils.

“I know a safe place!” he responded. “Here, clean up!” handing a white handkerchief to her.

“Thank you!” She sobbed, “Where is safe, Jef?”

“Hey, look at me!” He spoke gently, “Everything’s going to be fine, okay?”

Hundreds of cars filled the streets, all running uncontrollably. Another huge object fell from the sky, crashing into a nearby gas station. The explosion lit up the surroundings. Jeffery set his eyes on the road ahead, dodging through what lied before them. Their hearts were pounding hard.

“Oh God!” Karen said. Quickly winding down the window, she started vomiting.

“Are you okay?” He asked, “Should I pull over?”

“No!” She protested, “Don’t pull over, Jef. Please, let’s just keep going!”

“Are you alright?” He asked again.

“Yes,” she said. She wiped her tears, “I’ll be okay...Is it war?”

“What?”

“Are we at war?” She asked, “But if it’s war, the government would have announced it, right?”

Jeffery nodded his head, “That’s right!”

“And even if an enemy is to attack this country,” she said. “First there’s got be a conflict of interest maybe, then tension, followed by warnings and declaration of war, right?”

“Yes!” Jeffery said, nodding his head again.

“You don’t just attack a nation without issuing a warning and or a threat, right?” She added.

He only smiled, holding her hand.

“Why are you quiet, Jef?” She said, “There’s got be some answers! There’s always an answer, right?”

“Yes!” He replied. He wrapped his arm around her as he draw her gently towards him so she’d rest on his chest.

As the frightened duo manoeuvred their way through the city; they saw lots of dead bodies lying on the ground, numerous road traffic accidents and people crying for help. Many more fuel stations and buildings on fire.

“That sound, Jef!” She said, “Is it, you know, maybe the sound of huge explosion from nuclear bomb far from here or some kind of new weapon fired by the Chinese or Russians or...North Korea?”

“I highly doubt that,” he responded. “That mustn’t have come from an artificial source.”

“What do you mean?” She asked.

“Well, you see...” he sighed. “I don’t think that sound came from a man-made source.”

“Then where did it come from?” She asked again.

Jeffery couldn’t say a word, he only turned and smiled at her as he drove with care and caution. He took a sharp right turn at a junction, climbing the sidewalk and back on the road again just so to create a scene in order to avoid giving her a confident answer.

“Do you have anybody in town, like family or relative you’d like us to check?” He asked, with his left hand on the steering wheel.

“I’m all alone!” She said in her trembling voice, “I’m by my lonely! Just my cat Rose but she drowned a week ago!” Karen began to cry.

“You’re not alone!” He said. Jeffery kissed her on the forehead, “You still have me!”

She sobbed. Karen gently grabbed his hand which was resting on the emergency brake and buried her left hand in it.

“You’ve got anything you wanna pick from your place?” He asked.

“I’m scared!” She replied, “I don’t wanna go anywhere. I just wanna be wherever you are, wherever you go, I’ll go!”

“Got a couple of stuff I’ll need to pick at my place, if you don’t mind!” He remarked, “After that, we’re going to have to find a way to get to old Timothy’s place. We’ll pick him up then go to a much safer place.”

“Who’s Timothy?” She asked.

“Some old guy I believe would have some clues on this whole hellish occurrences!” He said.

“Okay!” She said.

They drove to his apartment. Jeffery asked her to wait downstairs in the vehicle but she refused. Karen opened the glove compartment and handed him a searchlight.

His room was stuffy and unkempt. Using the searchlight, Jeffery’s feet cruised through the books and some of the stuff scattered on the floor of his living room.

“Nice place!” She said.

“Sorry I didn’t uh... There was no time to clean up before I left for work!” He said, “You know!”

“Good excuse.” Karen said.

Jeffery walked into his bedroom and picked a diary from underneath his pillow. Unknown to him, Karen was right by the door watching him as he knelt next to his bed and talked in a soft and indistinct manner as if he was disputing with someone. She could notice the anger in his little act.

“Are you praying?” She inquired.

“Jesus!” He said, “Karen!”

“I’m sorry,” she responded. “I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“It’s okay!” Jeffery answered, “Let’s go.” He stood up.

“Maybe when things settle down, we’re going to have to do some cleaning up here?” She said.

“If things settle down, Karen. IF!” He replied. He took a bag and picked a few clothes and some beverages from the fridge. He asked her to check around if she could find anything that’d be useful to them.

There was a knock on the door. They all stopped what they were doing. The knock came through once again. As Jeffery made his way to the door, Karen tried to stop him but he went ahead and opened it anyway.

A woman ran into his arms.

“Oh Jeffery. Thank God you’re alive!” The woman said.

Karen couldn’t hide her jealousy. Crossing her arms, enviously.

“I can’t find my kids.” The woman added, “Right after that loud noise that sent us all to the floor. We were together, I mean, they were right there with me. After about a minute or so, I got up from the floor and...They were all gone. My children, they had all disappeared.”

“How do you mean, Sandra?” he asked, “Aren’t they supposed to be at school?”

“No!” She replied, stuttering. “I was with them, in the living room. They are on holiday. Christmas holiday started three days ago. We were watching TV. Kingston said he wanted to watch cartoon and since I was less busy, I sat down with him and his two sisters who later joined us. They were all there when it happened. Even though I didn’t hear their voices while I was screaming. I only found this!” unveiling her children’s clothes. “And this...” bringing out their shoes, “What happened, Jeffery?” She sobbed inconsolably, “This is a dream, right? The Lord wouldn’t do this to me, would He? Could He? He wouldn’t let this happen to us, right?”

“Where’s Mark?” He asked her.

“My husband had a meeting by 2:00pm this afternoon.” She said, “He was supposed to leave yesterday but took the morning flight. We dropped him at the airport around 8:45am this morning, then went to the mall with the kids to get some groceries.”

Jeffery turned and looked at Karen.

“Tina caught the flu, so I had to get her some medicine at the pharmacy.” said the bewildered mother, “Now they are all gone! I can’t find my kids! Their father would kill, Jef. Mark will kill me. My children!” She buried her head in his chest once more.

“It’ll be alright, Sandra!” he said, “Everything will be alright. Did you look around the house? What about the neighbours, have you asked them?”

“I looked everywhere,” she answered. “I tried dialling 911, the phone’s not working. All lines are dead! The internet’s dead! Angela’s child has disappeared too!”

“Angela?” He responded, “I thought she was pregnant?”

“Yes! Her E.D.D is next Friday!” She answered.

“E.D.D?” He asked.

“Estimated Due Date!” Karen said.

Jeffery still confounded.

“Expected date of delivery, Jef!” Karen emphasized, “The date a pregnant woman is expected to give birth?”

“Oh!” He said. “Look, Sandra,” he turned to her. “This place isn’t safe anymore. I’m just trying to pick up some necessary stuff I’d need. We’re getting out of here, now! And I want you to come with us, okay?” He held her hand, “I know a safe place!”

“I can’t,” she said. “I have to wait for my children to come back home. I have to wait for Mark. I cannot just walk away.”

“We won’t leave the city,” he said. “I’ll just take us to a place I believe is much safer, for now. And then we’ll try and contact Mark. I believe all the children are fine!”

“Where? How?” She interjected, “I can’t leave without my children, Jef! I can’t live without them!” Sandra gazed into his eyes, she began to cry. “You shouldn’t worry much. I have a handgun, Mark taught me how to use it. I’ll wait for my family. They’ll come home, they always do!”

“I think we’ll need this, right?” said Karen. She waved a searchlight she found somewhere on the floor, in the room.

“Yeah!” He sighed. He turned back to Sandra, “Listen...”

“You should not worry about me, Jeffery!” She insisted, “Just go. I’ll be alright. I’ll just hang around with Angela and the rest of the neighbours. We’ll be fine. You should take care of yourself out there.” Sandra turned and made her way out of the room, gently shutting the door behind her.

“Jeffery!” Karen said, “I wanna pee. Where’s your bathroom?”

“In there...First door on your left,” he said, pointing at his bedroom door.

“Thanks!”

Minutes later, Karen and Jeffery were back in the SUV.

“So where do we go?” She asked, “The police station?”

“If this is what I think it is...” he said. “I don’t think the entire army of the world can save us from it. We need to go see someone, then go somewhere!”

“What do you mean?” She asked.

“I don’t think that thing we saw is alone!” He said, “Also, if it is what I think it is, I’m afraid the worse is yet to come! For immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken!”

“Okay, you’re being a bit spine-chilling!” She joked, “Come down to my grade, Padre!”

“Matthew 24:29.” He said, “I think we’re probably witnessing what you’d call...The end of the world! End of days! The eleventh hour or just simply put, last days!”

“Last days...of what?” She asked.

Jeffery laughed.

“What?” She asked again, “You said ‘last days’ and I asked you what it all mean?”

“You don’t read the bible, do you?” He smiled, sighing as he gazed at her.

A woman screamed from his apartment. They heard multiple gunshots. And many more screams echoed from the building.

“Jeffery!” Karen said, “I think we should go!”

Jeffery turned the key in the ignition, switching on the headlights as they screeched off, leaving nothing but smoke and skid marks behind.

Chapter Three: A glimpse of Hope.

Karen and Jeffery arrived at an old cottage house in the woods that stood on the brow of the hill. Jeffery gently moved and parked not far from the porch, hitting a wastebin. The light from their headlamp gave them a good view of almost all the dead birds lying around the old cottage house. A sheep and a goat could be seen lying dead on the ground. They also noticed a big old truck, parked under a tree not far from the old wooden house.

“Where’s this place?” She whispered.

“Come with me!” He said.

They got out of the car and walked straight to the door. Jeffery pushed the door, giving way, it made a popping and cracking sound. Karen held his shirt firmly as she walked behind him.

They heard the sound of a shotgun being cocked.

“I believe you know what she’s trying to say.” said a frail, deep masculine voice.

“It’s me, Jeffery Bobson!” He said, raising his hands up.
“I am here to see Timothy. The owner of this place!”

“Ha-Ha!” came a laughter from an old man, switching on a searchlight. “Boy, am I glad to see you!”

The men shook hands and hugged each other.

“Oh my God!” The old man added, “Please shut the door. Who’s the beauty?”

“Oh, my uh...Friend, Karen Keaton.” He answered, “Karen, meet Timothy Mithbucks!”

“Hello!” She said, stretching her hand for a shake. Noticing a muffler around his ears.

“Well, hello!” responded the old man, “You smell beautiful. I sensed that fragrance before hearing the sound of your footsteps!” He shook her hand.

“You never change, Timothy!” Jeffery said.

“Trust me, I shed the skin of my heart every now and then.” He responded, “Wonder why I look older but stronger than you, boy!” He giggled, “I still got it in me, you know, get me a wife and I’ll show you!”

They all laughed. On switching off his searchlight, the old man lit up a lamp.

“Speaking of a wife,” he said. “I see you’ve finally made up your mind.” he brought the lamp closer to Karen’s face,

“Wow!” throwing a thumb up at Jeffery, “You’ve got good eyes, son! This one here is a rare gem.”

“Thank you, Timothy!” She said, a bit shy.

Jeffery cleared his throat.

“Call me, Tim,” he said. “Cause I’m stronger than your Team! Ha-Ha! Did it rhyme or what?”

“It sure did,” she said. “It sure did!”

“Please sit. Grab a seat.” He responded, “Welcome to my humble abode!”

“Thanks, man!” Jeffery answered, “Whew!” expressing a relief.

“Would you like some tea?” the old man asked. “The kitchen is over there, make yourself at home young lady. The last time a woman walked these floors was like, a decade ago? There’s food in there too. I cooked some beans this morning. Also if you check the drawers up there, you might see some of those tin can stuff Jeffery bought for me weeks back. I think some noodles too or something!” he gently sat down on a rocking chair, and lit up a smoking pipe with matches. Timothy took off his ear muffler. “Dead birds all of over the

damn place! Who's gonna sweep that?" He added, "Toocho and Margaret are dead too!"

"Toocho and Margaret?" Karen remarked.

"His Goat and Sheep!" Jeffery said. Scratching his nose, he added, "They were his um...pets!"

"Oh!" She responded, "So sorry for your...Loss, Tim!"

"Oh, thank you, beautiful!" said the old man, he puffed. "They are better off dead anyway. Did you hear that freaking sound this morning? Lord! I was taking a pee and the pipeline just went freeze! Nothing dropped, I ran out without zipping up and the whole house was shaking. I was like; oh my God, is this how the big guy wants me to die?"

Karen and Jeffery burst into laughter, along with the old man.

"Is this how you want me to die?" He gagged, "I kept saying that in my mind. I struggled down into the basement and stayed there like a chicken that's about to be dragged to the slaughter house!"

"We were at the office when it happened," Jeffery said. "It was terrible."

“Terrible is too much smaller a word to describe such awful, violent sound,” said the old man. “That was die-able!”

Karen couldn't control herself from laughing she had to excuse herself to the kitchen. Leaving the men alone in the living room.

“I am making tea, anyone?” She said.

“Yeah make some for me!” Jeffery said. Turning to the old man, he added, “So uh...Your truck, she still intact?”

“Why, for sure!” said the old man. “She hadn't moved in a while but I always give her a kick every morning. You were the one who took her out last.”

“Timothy, that's like three weeks ago!” Jeffery said, “You need to let her feel the road, come on oldie!”

“Yeah, right!” He responded, “Like I've got the bones and balls to!”

Karen made some tea, and by the time she came back with the cups and some biscuits, she eavesdropped on the men.

“Does she know?” the old man whispered.

“No! Not yet,” Jeffery answered. “But you're coming with us, right?”

Karen approached them. Jeffery was showing something to the old man in the diary he picked from underneath his pillow.

“Who would’ve thought this would come true in our times, eh?” said the old man, carefully studying as he mumble the words from the page before him. “You see, you haven’t lost your purpose as you used to think after all. You’ve got a much bigger task ahead of you, son! I always told you; be careful what you wish for!”

Karen handed the tea cup to Jeffery, who sipped once and kept it on the wooden table in the middle of the room. His attention was more on the old man.

“So, do you think it’s an alien?” Karen asked.

“No, they’re not aliens from another world.” answered the old man.

“They?” She emphasized.

“Yes!” He added, “They’re people you probably knew. We all must have come in contact with them at a point in time; could be the streets, market place, worship places and or working place.” He coughed, “And the neighbourhood! What you saw in its heart is the intensity of hatred for a particular

kind of people, which is made manifest physically. And for now, nothing or no one can stop them. This is so because...The spirit of God has parted from this wicked world, finally. The thing is, there's no stopping them, and there is no stopping what is to come either."

"Wow!" She said.

"How many did you see?" asked the old man.

"We encountered only one though," Jeffery said.

"Only one," she replied. "The military claimed we have one of the best facilities for testing so they brought it some days ago, for examination!"

"More will come!" said the old man. "Almost or probably half the population of the people in this world or even more!"

"I don't get it!" She added.

"Well, you see," said the old man. "They are not some out-of-this-world entities. They are human beings. What you witnessed was a sheer manifestation of evil and pure hatred from those who turned their backs against the son of man, separating themselves both in spirit, soul and body from Christ thereby, desperately seeking ways to torture, punish

and try to kill those who still align themselves with the messiah, before his second return!”

“I still don’t get it,” Karen said. “It doesn’t make any sense. There’s a logical explanation to virtually every phenomenon. Why do you people always bring gods or God into this, who are a product of man’s imagination out of greed and the need for power in order to oppress and control the masses into believing something that can be...Something that can be...”

“Something that can be what?” asked the old man. “Go on. We’re listening!”

Karen paused and gently walked to the corner of the room, sitting down on the floor she burst into tears.

“I’m no fan of religion myself,” said Timothy. “But at my age, if I don’t know the truth by now then I must be the biggest fool that ever walked the surface of the earth. Men have rejected the only way to peace. The world has turned its back on the innocent. The blood of the innocent that sank down has weakened the earth, and the blood cries out to the One above.” He sighed, “Know one thing; where love resideth

not, hatred dwelleth! The horrors are yet to begin. The problem is, even Death would be nowhere to be found.”

“What are you saying?” She asked.

“During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them!” said Jeffery.

“What?” She asked again.

“Revelation 9:6.” The old man said, “Who would’ve thought I’d witness it. I used to think God punished me by taking my wife and three kids in that flood. But, I guess it’s better to find myself in this dreadful situation alone than watch my own family stuck in this terrible events! How does one protect one’s loved ones from these dark times?”

“The worst is yet to come!” Jeffery said.

“We’re in a time when God would shut down his mind. He will blot out the memory of our existence so he doesn’t get to think of us. This way, his mercy would not reach down to us! His love would depart from us. And you know...God is love. So, wherever His love dwelleth not, His presence inhabiteth not!” He coughed, “One of the ways to conquer the world is to be in it but not be of it, son! I wish I’m as strong

and able as you, I would've probably done greater things. But, even my cussed heart knows I've had my chances!"

"If these times you guys are talking about is to come," She asked. "I mean, well, what is the way out?"

"Well, there's only but one way," said the old man, "First you have to look at who or what has given the world a good account of what the world is facing or would face, then you should also know that the way out could only be found from whom or whatever it is that best describes what is to come or what had already come. My best bet so far, even though this may sound a bit silly, is Jesus...especially to you young lady." He clenched his fist, "It is said that those who have accepted Him as the way, the truth and the life would escape eternal condemnation. But when these dark times spoken of is to come, men would seek and call unto He that they rejected but He will lend them His ears NOT! However, some believes would also face such ordeal. For they too, must glorify the name of the Lord whom they so boast of. Before and during the darkest hours and beyond, and must pass the torch of hope to those who still look up to the day Jehovah would remember His children! At this age, I've figured that

this is a fact! Look at the world right now! Innocent children slaughtered for no just cause and so on. The earth is being fed with more blood by men than rain from the clouds!”

“So, would the uh...Children of God who’d find themselves in the darkest days experience the suffering too?” She asked.

“Somehow, yes! If you find yourself in such a time and see yourself as the child of God, yes!” He said, “But something would be left inside of them who still believe, which shall keep the torch of hope burning.” Clearing his throat, “You see, they that trust in Him even in the absence of the light must persevere, and when the Day of Judgment cometh, they shall be spared for holding on to their faith in He that saved the world. And in their hearts keep the commandment of He that created all. In other words, to get out of this whole mess you’ve gotta set your eyes on the cross before you, and leave the world behind you!”

“This is not happening.” Karen said, “I know that being old means being filled with wisdom. But you can’t always be right, right?”

“You’re right!” responded the old man, “I’m never always right. If I am, my family would still be alive today!”

The room went dead silent.

“Now, if it’s true God is out there and that He loves us. What have I done wrong to be part of this?” She said, “I’ve never asked to be born. My mum and I had to run away from my father because he was abusive.” Karen paused, “I was only six when we ran away to a different state but she died the day I turned nine. Practically raised myself because I spent a few years at the orphanage then when I got older I ran from the orphanage to go looking for my father, you know. Luckily I met this old couple who took me in, put me in school. They took care of me. They passed away and I had to move on so I went back in search of my dad, and after years and years of searching, I found him...but he passed away too in his sleep, six months just when life was beginning to make sense.” She forced a laughter out, “Okay if that’s not enough. I’ve worked my butts in an agency for years and just when I finally got promoted, well, we all know what happened hours ago! And you telling me God cares?” She sighed, “Come on!”

Jeffery stood up and began walking towards her.

“I want to be left alone for now!” She sobbed.

“Let her be, son!” said the old man, “Not all tears you stop from falling. Some tears fall to heal. Rain makes the land fertile, and so does tears to our lives, most of the times!”

Jeffery sighed, he walked back and picked the tea cup from the old wooden table.

“Hey, son!” Timothy said, “The light shines brightest in the darkest places!”

“Thanks!” Jeffery said, “Well, um...you go ahead and get some rest. We can’t stay here. We need to move to a much safer place.” Walking out of the living room, he added, “Timothy, it’ll be a lot better and safer if you’d come with us.”

“Son, I think I’ve reached that time when I can confidently say; I’m tired of living in this miserable filthy world.” He coughed, “A man can’t spend his entire life running. Sometimes you have to turn and go head on at ya foes!” The old man turned to Karen, “Hey beautiful. You don’t sound like someone who hates God. You look like someone who wish God would prove Himself more in your life. The thing about Him is; when you challenge him to show

Himself or use you as a vessel, you better get ready for what's coming to ya!" He giggled, "I've lived long enough to know that just because one is good and have nothing against anybody doesn't mean life would be fair to one! Everything happens for a reason!"

Karen wiped the tears from her eyes, nodding her head she heaved heavily.

"What do you know about him?" He said, "Jeffery Bopson?"

"We're colleagues," she said in a soft tone. "We've known each other for a couple of years!"

"In the biblical sense?" He asked, "Not that I mean to poke my nose in ya biz." He smiled.

"No!" She giggled, "I've always like him though!"

"Mmm!" exclaimed the old man, "Funny, he always talks about the girl from his working place; emphasises about your dimple and beautiful smile all the time."

Karen smiled in a modest way, "But he never asked me out!"

"Is that so?" The old man teased, "Maybe he doesn't want to get attached to anything that would deeply hurt him

when he loses it, or maybe he doesn't want you to be hurt when his work is done!"

"What do you mean?" She said.

"So he never told you about the revelations; his dreams, and some of the visions he had about...you and him?" The old man added, "Did he tell you about his parents, about his wife and son? His past?"

"No! He doesn't talk much." She replied, in disbelief, "We never got to um..."

"He's a good kid," old Timothy accentuated. "He just had a rough sail through the boisterous winds and waves of life, that's all. But time heals all wounds. Look at the gold bars and sparkling diamonds...Ever wondered what those stuff go through before they are made to shine?" He coughed again, "In case you feel exhausted you can go upstairs; there's another lamp on the shelf, even though I won't advise having lights shining through the windows from up there. The first door to your right's mine, pick any of the other rooms. Okay, beautiful?"

Karen nodded, "Okay! Thank you." She said, "Can you tell me a little bit about him?"

“You’re going to have to dig that out yourself.” He smiled, “Just ask him, in a polite manner!”

Karen nodded again, “Okay!” standing up.

The wooden staircase creaked as she made her way up.

The old man heaved a deep sigh and puffed his pipe, flipping through Jeffery’s diary.

Jeffery gently sat down on the porch swing chair outside. As he sipped more from the cup, he sensed the presence of something alien in the woods. Standing up, he noticed a flame in human form running in great speed towards the house.

“Karen! Timothy! Run!!!” He cried. But before he could take a step, the beast had crushed the door and into the house.

Karen was already screaming from upstairs by the time Jeffery had entered the living room. The old man was still on his rocking chair, with smoke coming out of his mouth. His arms spread on the armrest; the beast had sank its hand into the old man’s chest, it turned and stared at Jeffery, who was frozen. Its feet had burnt holes on the floor, setting the wooden floor on fire. The old man was laughing and coughing out blood.

“See, I told ya!” snorted the old man in pain, “I’ve got a strong and precious heart!” He placed his smoking pipe back into his mouth and made an attempt to inhale some smoke, but coughed out blood again.

On noticing a poker by the fireplace, Jeffery rushed for it, and with it he delivered a sharp blow on the beast’s head. It only landed on a hard surface, igniting sparks of fire. The beast turned, removing its hand from the old man’s chest, with the old man’s heart in its fist, it lifted its hand and crushed it.

Jeffery stood face to face with his nightmare, taking a few steps back. The beast followed him gently, breathing out fire from its nostrils. Another beast made its way into the house from the shattered door.

“Oh my God!” Karen cried out she stepped down from the stairs.

“Don’t move, Karen!” Jeffery instructed.

The second beast walked up to Jeffery, growling strangely as it stared at him. It turned to the first beast, and they both let a loud roar, angrily, spreading their arms to attack Jeffery. Leaving Karen behind them. Jeffery held firm

the poker, waving it from one side to the other. He signalled Karen to pick his diary from the old man's hand.

Karen then walked slowly to the rocking chair, relieving the diary from the old man's grip she ran out of the house, which was already in flames. The beasts ignored her, setting their eyes on Jeffery. As the first beast took a step to attack, the SUV came crashing in on them through the shattered door. Karen gathered courage and sent the beasts flying into the air, they crashed into the fire place.

“Get in!” She said.

Jeffery quickly jumped through the driver's side window as she shifted the gear, putting the vehicle to reverse, tearing one of her tires off of the burning wooden floor.

They managed to get out of the burning house, and as soon as she shifted the gear back to drive, the engine went off.

“What happened?” Jeffery said.

“It won't start!” She said. Karen turned the key in the ignition over and over again.

“There is no light on the dashboard!” Jeffery said, “It won't start!”

Thy heard a crashing sound as the beasts jumped out of the burning house.

“Get out of the car! Now!” He said, “Run!”

Karen unbuckled her seatbelt and tried to get out of the SUV.

“It won’t open!” She cried, “It’s stuck!”

“Damn thing is jammed!” He suggested, “Window!”

The two of them got out of the car via the driver’s window. But by the time they landed on the ground, the beasts were already staring down on them.

“We’re dead!” Karen said.

“No! We’re not!” He said. Standing to his feet, he added, “You’re afraid of me, aren’t you?”

Karen remained on the ground behind him next to the SUV.

“Jeffery, are you crazy?” She lamented, “What are you doing?”

“Perhaps!” He said, “All they do is roar at me. They can’t touch me!”

“What?” Karen whispered, “Are you insane?”

“No!” He said, breathing hard. “It’s what I have noticed! They are just trying to scare me. Put fear in me!”

“We’re definitely dead!” She added.

“No, we are not!” He said, “They feed on fear! I know these things, I can tell. They feed on fear!” he gasped, standing before them, “Move back, Karen!”

Jeffery took some steps toward the beast and they moved backwards.

The beasts looked at each other and then one of them began taking steps forward. With flames burning all round its body, it moved closer to Jeffery, stretching its hand towards his chest. The fire from its hand quenched as it grabbed hold of Jeffery’s necklace, it forced the chain off of his neck and opened its mouth wide then swallowed the cross. It chewed on it, sucking the chains into its mouth like a strip of pasta.

“Okay!” Jeffery exclaimed, “This is a bad idea!”

The other beast got quite close to him and roared. Jeffery forced a saliva down his throat.

“Karen, are you there?” He yelled.

“Uh huh!” She said, “I’m here!”

The second beast lifted its hand to deliver a powerful strike down on Jeffery's head when a force field blocked its blow. Jeffery used his hands to cover his head.

A brand new pickup truck broke through the woods behind Jeffery and headed towards them. Karen rolled under the SUV as Jeffery jumped to his left. Sweeping the beasts off of their feet, throwing them back into the burning house. The engine from the pickup truck shutdown.

“Karen, are you okay?” Jeffery yelled.

“I'm okay!” She said. Karen came out from underneath the SUV, “What was...Who was that?” She panted as Jeffery helped her up.

“I have no idea!” He responded.

The driver of the pickup truck tried to start up the engine with much effort that seemed pointless. Two men and two ladies got out of the vehicle.

“Are you alright?” Jeffery asked them, “Are you guys okay?”

“Yeah! We're fine!” answered the driver, “Is that big truck working?”

“I hope so.” Jeffery responded.

“Did you see that?” Karen said to Jeffery, “Oh my God! It didn’t harm you!” She observed his body for sign of any injury, “You are okay!”

“See what?” Jeffery asked.

“That thing,” She said, puzzled. “Something like a...an electromagnetic thingy repelled the blow from that beast when it tried to hit you!”

“Are you guys okay,” the driver asked.

“Yeah!” Jeffery responded, “We’re fine! Appreciate it!”

“Mind checking if that big truck can get us out of here before they pop back?” said the driver.

Karen walked to the big truck while the men stood in wait, over what may come out of the fire. She couldn’t open the passenger side so she went round to the other side. She got in and checked around but found nothing. Karen then reached up for the sun visor, the keys came falling.

“I found them!” She yelled, “I found the keys!”

The fire from the house lit up the surroundings.

“By the way, I’m Russell!” The driver said, “This is my brother, Robby. That’s Jennifer, my wife and that’s Christine, Robby’s girlfriend!”

Jeffery exchanged a handshake with the men.

Karen did not hesitate to start the big old truck after a little struggle with the ignition.

“Alright, guys!” Jeffery said, “Let’s get out of here!”

“Grab the bags,” said Russell. “Grab the food, Robby!”

Robby and the two ladies ran back to the pickup truck as instructed, Jeffery ran to the big old truck.

Jeffery got into the passenger seat while the others rode the back. Russell came in holding two shotguns and some bullet packs.

“Nice gun, friend!” Jeffery said, “But I don’t think your bullets can even scratch their skin. If they have one that is!”

“I know,” He answered. “I have seen them in action. This isn’t for them. Anything can happen. We might need it anyway, you never know!”

“Now it’s beginning to look like a dream!” Karen said, “Thank God. I’ll soon wake up! Hopefully!”

“Do you have my diary?” He asked, as they switched sides.

“Yes!” She responded, “Here it is!” handing him the diary.

The other four squeezed themselves at the backseat.

“What’s with the diary?” Robby asked.

“Jeffery here knows a safe house.” Karen said, happily.

“He’s taking us to a safe place!”

“So uh, what are we waiting for, huh?” said Russell. “Hit the gas! Put the damn pedal to the metal, man!”

Jeffery gently drove the truck away from the house, watching it burn from the side mirror.

As they got to a cliff overlooking the burning city. They could see more than a thousand beasts from afar, emerging from the city. The only sources of light were the burning buildings, burning trees and the fiery beasts that lit up the surroundings they walked.

Chapter Four: The Safe House

Karen, Jeffery and their new friends traded stories on how they all survived the first wave of attacks. And they have managed to stay alive for some hours after darkness covered the earth.

They drove pass a big white painted church in the outskirts of the city.

“Don’t you guys think we should rest for a while?” Christine suggested.

“She’s right,” Karen supported. “I feel like a dead whale! I second that motion!”

“Those in favour of resting here and now say, aye!” Christine said.

“Aye!” They all said in unison.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen!” Christine added, “The ayes have it!”

Jeffery turned and carefully packed the big old truck in front of the church. As he switched off the headlamps, they noticed not a single light shone from the church and the house next to it.

Russell, on landing, cocked his shotgun. Followed by the sound of Robby cocking another. Jeffery led them carefully, as the ladies chained behind them.

The doors of the church came gently open, they all made their way in trying hard to hold back even the sound of their own breath.

“Shut the doors.” Jeffery whispered.

Jennifer, the last on the chain pushed the doors shut.

“Yes, shut the doors!” came a voice in the dark, “And drop your weapon!”

They heard multiple sounds of guns being cocked in the dark. Some Handheld lights came on.

“Easy! Easy, everyone!” Jeffery said, “We mean no harm. We’re just looking for a place to hide from...”

“We know,” interjected the voice. “Drop your weapon!”

More lights came on from two searchlights.

“Maybe you didn’t hear me well,” said the voice once more. “Drop it!”

The two brothers gently laid their guns on the floor, standing up with their hands up.

“Good, now...” said the voice. “Push’em!”

Russell pushed the guns with his foot.

“Now, that wasn’t hard, was it?” A man in army uniform said, approaching them.

Two more searchlights came on, this time from behind them. As Jeffery turned, he sighted three more men in uniform.

“Captain Cruz,” said the man in a deep tone. “Welcome. The preacher’s dead. But you’re safe! And for safety reasons, we’ll confiscate your guns for now.”

Jeffery, Karen and the rest took a sigh of relief.

“Alright boys!” The Captain said, “Lights out! So, whatchu got in the truck?”

“Nothing!” Jeffery said.

“Are you sure?” The Captain asked again.

“Just our clothes...and food!” Christine said.

“Alright then,” he said. “Just find anywhere or anything you can squeeze your butts on. The pulpit is taken.”

A woman approached them saying, “Jeffery...Karen?”

“Oh my God,” Karen said, excitedly. “Melanie? Is that you?” They hugged each other.

“You guys made it!” Melanie said.

“Where’s your daughter?” Karen asked.

Wiping the tears from her eyes she said, “She’s gone! Bella’s gone!”

“What happened?” Jeffery asked.

“Well, she uh...” said Melanie. “I woke up in the morning as I was getting ready to go to work. Bella told me not to go out, at first I thought she was joking so I went ahead to prepare. By the time I was set, Bella had locked the whole house and hid the keys.” She sobbed, “I was so angry I...hit her. She ran to her room. So I followed her demanding for the keys. Bella refused. She said something bad is going to happen and she doesn’t want to lose me. I thought she was crazy because she was so serious about it, I got hold of the keys and she started crying begging me not to go out. She couldn’t stop crying and I thought maybe I should stay for a while with her and report to work once she’d calmed. We cuddled in her bed and...dozed off...then this terrible sound woke us up, that’s when...my Bella just...disappeared right in front of my very eyes...Leaving only her clothes behind.”

“She’s okay. She’s safe!” Jeffery said. “She knew what was about to happen.”

“She has been telling me about these things,” said Melanie. “I never believed her. I thought she made it all up, you know kids, probably seeking for attention. I should’ve known!”

“Hey,” yelled the Captain. “Why don’t you guys cut the family reunion and find a spot and lie down quietly so my boys can put their eyes and ears to good use.”

“I am glad seeing you guys!” said Melanie, as she sobbed and went back to her spot. Karen and Jeffery found a good place on the floor and slept in each other’s arms.

There were about a hundred civilians and thirteen men in uniform including the Captain. The armed men kept watch.

After a long and restless nap, Karen woke up having experienced a nightmare. She cuddled herself back in Jeffery’s arms once more. He held her warmly and she kissed him. He kissed her back.

“Are you related to Timothy?” She whispered, “And why haven’t you told me about your parents and...your wife...and child, Jef?”

Jeffery felt a bit uncomfortable, he gently withdrew his arms, sitting up. He sighed.

“How did you find out?” He asked.

“I didn’t,” she replied. “Timothy only said something about you going through some issues in the past or so. I asked him what happened. He told me to find out myself...From you. I am sorry if I’m...”

“It’s okay,” he interposed, sighing. “My parents died. Two years before I joined the agency. Along with my wife and kid!”

Karen sat upright. Touching him on the back she said, “I am deeply sorry! I didn’t know!”

“It’s alright!” He said.

“You want to talk about it?” She asked. Karen wrapped her hand around his shoulder. “If you don’t, I’ll understand!”

“Henrietta and I met back in high school, you know how it goes.” He said, smiling. “Well, we got married and had a child, a beautiful son. We agreed to name him Victor. So um...my parents came to the hospital the day we were discharged, and on our way home...this drunk truck driver swerved from his lane and...” he wept. “If I had known, I should’ve waited to collect some of the drugs the doctor prescribed. Henrietta suggested we buy it from the pharmacy

at the hospital before leaving. But you know, I told her that it's best we get it from the drugstore near the house. If only I had listened to her, we would've wasted a little time and the accident wouldn't have happened!"

"It's not your fault, baby!" She consoled him.

"I prayed, a lot!" He sobbed, "I even thanked God the day she delivered. Promised Him we'll raise the child in ways He'd be pleased. I chose to name our child Victor because I kept having these visions and dreams where I keep hearing a voice calling on that word; Victor! Victor! If only I had listened to her."

"I'm here for you if you need me, however you need me," she said, softly.

"Thank you." He said, "That's how I met Timothy; he came for the funeral. And we've been friends ever since! He has encouraged me a lot!"

Someone pointed a searchlight at them. Obviously one of the officers on guard.

Jeffery turned and embraced Karen. She sobbed. They went back to sleep, wrapped in each other's arms once more.

Karen and Jeffery were later awakened by the sound of a box being dragged down the aisle.

“Hey! Psst!” Captain Cruz called to Jeffery’s attention, “Let me have a word with you, mate!”

Jeffery stood up, approaching him he said, “Is everything okay, officer?”

“Well, yes. All is well, my friend!” He said. Grabbing Jeffery gently by the arm, the Captain added, “One of my scout’s back said those things are headed this way!”

“So, we’re all moving, right?” Jeffery said.

“Well, yes. WE ARE!” The Captain said, “The young chap, Robby, over there says you know a safe place.”

“Well, yes!” He responded, “But it’s far from here and I don’t think the fuel in the truck can even take us there!”

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” he said, grandiosely. “You can abandon your truck and ride along with us. I’ve got a Stryker, a Humvee and two trucks. But we can only carry two of you.” He sniffed, “So that’s uh...you and one of them. Need the trucks for supplies; food and ammunition!”

The people began to wake up.

“I can’t do that!” Jeffery mumbled, turning to Karen and the others. “They’re my frie...” He paused. “They are my family.”

“How safe is this place you know of?” The Captain asked.

“Very safe!” Jeffery answered, “Up on the mountain, not that far from the city.”

“Okay! Now, listen,” whispered the Captain. “My men and I can’t afford to carry too much garbage. We wouldn’t want to be dragged down, you know what I mean. You on the other hand is an asset, your wife of course can come along but uh...”

“She’s not my wife,” he said. “She’s my uh...she’s my girl!” he sighed, with joy.

“Well, Romeo,” the Captain teased. “Juliet’s got a free ticket too!”

“What about the others?” Jeffery asked.

“They are expendable,” he said. “They can stay here if they want! We met them praying here anyway! It’s a church God damn it! The safest place in the whole world, right? They can all stay here and pray harder, maybe when they blow

God's eardrums up, He might finally come down from his mighty throne to um...save us?!"

"You can't do this!" Jeffery said, "I can't...Abandon them just like that!"

"Look, buddy," the Captain added. "I know in times like these some hotheads would want to play Rambo and all that crap but you see, I'm in charge here. I don't even consider men like you good enough for breakfast, I throw'm to the dogs! You pack these people along soon they'll start making demands on the leader. I ain't ready to follow in the footsteps of Moses. Besides, this ain't Egypt!" Gently pulling his pistol from the holster. "You either do as I say or..."

"Is everything alright, Jeffery?" said Russell, as he approached the men.

"Everything's fine!" Jeffery said, "Big boy Captain Cruz here says Robby told him about the safe house, and that he wants me and Karen to come with them. So I asked him, what about the others!"

"Yeah! Captain Cruz," Russell said. "What about us?"

"Answer the man, Captain." Jeffery added.

“You’d make a hit track with that line, my friend” said the Captain. Stepping up to Russell, he added, “Try going into music, it’ll suit ya! Just because I’m Captain Cruz, don’t mean I’m here to carry your cross, son!”

There was tension in the church. The soldiers raised their guns up, aiming at Russell and Jeffery.

Everybody stood to his feet, and so did their nerves.

“I got your little diary.” The Captain said, “Got it from the truck. I believe if we go through it, we might find your little safe house.”

“It’s no big deal. It’s only a diary!” Jeffery said, “Not an address book! You want to get to the safe house you need me. Or best yet,” he stared at the Captain. “Be my guest; go alone...along with the diary!”

“Put down the tubes, boys!” The Captain ordered his men, forcing a smile out, “Lay’m down!”

His men lowered their weapons.

“Alright then,” he added. “You win! Now, take us to the promise land! And God so help you it better be worth it!”

“Pardon me,” Jeffery said. “I’ve got to say a little prayer first!” Walking back to Karen, he added, “Need to pass your message to the big guy!”

Russell stared at the Captain then walked back to his wife.

Jeffery insisted that they pray together before leaving, and an elderly woman amidst the crowd volunteered to pray.

“Let’s say the Lord’s prayer!” The old woman said.

“Oh for Christ’s sakes!” Captain Cruz yelled, “Seriously?”

“Our Father, Who art in heaven

Hallowed be Thy Name;

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us;

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil. Amen!” Resounded their recitation.

“I’d swear even I...did not hear that,” said the mocking Captain, he laughed. “Alright, my people! Double up! Move it! Move it!” He yelled, “Let’s go!”

The people began to move out of the church to join the army in their convoy. There were some elderly people among them who couldn’t walk. Russell and Jeffery, and some of the abled men assisted the elderlies and got them on the truck.

While they were busy moving to the vehicles, one of the soldiers began firing shots. A beast has emerged, it caught him and tore him in half before descending on some of the people. They were all frightened by its size and sight. Some of the people ran back into the church screaming. The beast killed a few of them.

Captain Cruz ordered the drivers to move, and they were able to evacuate those who got lucky.

The beast ran into the church, followed by terrible screams that echoed.

Karen and Jeffery were in one of the trucks. As they moved through the woods, there was a pungent smell which made most of them cover their mouths and nostrils with their clothes. The soldiers had their gas masks on. After driving for

hours away from the city, they arrived at a mountain where Jeffery claimed the safe house was situated.

Jeffery held Karen by the hips, bring her down from the truck he said, “There’s something I’ve got to tell you, Karen!”

“I know, baby!” She said. “I love you too! Shyness won’t get you anything, babe! Learn to speak your heart.” She kissed him passionately, “Unless if you’ve got anything to add?”

“We’ll be okay!” He said, kissing her on the forehead. They both began to help the others come down from the truck.

“This is it, right?” asked the Captain. Approaching the love birds, he said, “Pardon my intrusion!”

“Yeah!” Jeffery answered, clearing his throat. “It’s up there!”

“Alright!” The Captain said, “Up it is then! Move it! Move it!”

“Keep it down, officer!” Jeffery said.

“Or what?” He said, “Look here, man. Just because you brought us here don’t mean you’re the one calling the shots. Remember that. I own this battalion, got that?”

About a dozen beasts jumped from the surrounded bushes. Piecing the hearts of those that could not run. The soldiers opened fire. All hell broke loose; their empty shells were more useful falling to the ground than the bullets hitting their targets. Some stray bullets killed a few civilians.

“Melanie! Melanie!” Jeffery yelled, “Melanie!”

“I’m here!” She answered, running to him. “Where’s Karen?”

“She’s here, she’s okay!” He said, “Let’s go. Run!”

Panting their way up the mountain, Karen held Jeffery’s hand firmly, with Melanie behind them. The beasts continued to hunt the people, emerging from the surroundings and increasing in number as the people ran up to the safe house. Those that were captured were instantly tortured and killed in a brutal manner. Some of the people were so frightened they surrendered and submitted to the beasts. Asking the beasts on what they require of them, which they were willing to do, but the beasts devoured them.

By the time those that survived got to the peak of the mountain, they had realized that Russell took a shot on his left

foot but he was able to climb the mountain just fine, with the help of his brother and wife.

Jeffery, Karen, Russell, Christine, Robby and his girlfriend, and the rest of the crew made it as they ran up the mountain. None of the elderly people made it out alive. Melanie was able to make it to the top of the mountain too.

From the peak they could see more beasts making their way up majestically. There was no place to run to. And one must dreadful truth that struck them all was, there was no safe house at the top of the mountain, nothing. Just an empty ground.

“Is this what you called a safe house?” Russell yelled, “Damn it!”

“We’re trapped!” Robby said, “We’re surrounded! What do we do?”

“Well, my friend,” the Captain laughed hysterically. “Congratulations, mate! You succeeded in dragging us up to our own graves!” He turned his gun and simultaneously aimed at Jeffery, “I’ve ran a lot of times from an enemy...Hell I’ve jumped from a burning plane and landed in the middle of the

enemy's territory but never foolishly delivered myself on their diner. You dumb bastard!"

"Captain!" Yelled one of the soldiers, cautiously.

"Shut it, Private!" He yelled back, "You have no idea how me and my boys survived to this stage, do you?"

The tactical light from his gun rested on Karen's face.

"You're blocking my view, woman!" the Captain snarled at her.

"Leave him alone!" Karen said. Standing between the firearm and Jeffery, she added, "Please, no!"

Melanie ran and stood behind Karen.

"Oh ladies, please!" The Captain emphasized, "Get the hell away from the path of my bullet!" He spat on the ground, "I swear on my mother's grave I'll shatter your skulls to get through to him!" Walking towards them, he lowered his weapon. "I said, get out of my way!" The Captain kicked Karen with his boot on the stomach, she fell to the ground. Slapped Melanie with the back of his hand, sending her down on one side, he raised his gun and fired two shots at Jeffery.

Karen was already on the ground, struggling to get up.

"Oh my God!" Christine cried out.

Karen stood up, running to Jeffery who was already falling to his knees.

“No! No!” She cried, “Baby, No!” Karen continued to weep as she held him, “What have you done?!”

“You were supposed to protect us all!” Melanie yelled with anger, running to the Captain she began hitting him. “What have you done? You were supposed to be a protector!”

The Captain held her with one hand and pushed her away.

“I sure can, I sure am, ma’am...” He yelled, “...against an enemy I understand! Yes! That, I can protect you from! Not these monsters from the abyss!”

“Oh, baby!” Karen cried, “Hold on, baby, you’ll be alright! Help! Please help me!”

Russell ran to them. The rest stood dumbfounded.

“It will be alright!” Jeffery groaned, “I know, it’ll be alright. Here,” pulling out the diary, he added, “Take this!”

“What? Why?” Karen asked in tears, “Baby, what are you talking about?”

“I’m sorry I never got the chance to explain everything.” He said, lying on the ground in her arms, “Everything will be

alright. This is...The safe house!” He smiled, handing her the diary.

“Baby, please hold on!” Checking his wounds on the chest.

“They’ll come!” He said, “It’s meant to happen! It’s all in there. All you need to know but, you have to trust Him. Have faith...in Him! And lead His people!”

“What people?” She asked, “What are you talking about, baby?”

Jeffery coughed out blood, he smiled and said, “You’re to take over from here. My work is just to beam the light, and you are to lead them!” He spoke in great pain.

“Light?” She said, “Lead?”

Russell rushed at the Captain, “You fool!” He shouted as he delivered a heavy punch, he sent the Captain down to the ground. Captain Cruz rolled down the mountain.

“Everything you need to know for now is in the diary!” Jeffery said, “This is what I’ve been trying to tell you. Knowing it’ll sound silly, I tried to wait for the right time!” Placing the diary in her hand, squeezing it firmly. As his eyes came shutting in, a bright white light appeared from his chest.

It was his heart, it came shining brightly as his entire body turned white, and the whole surrounding got illuminated with the bright white light.

“Jef. Baby,” Karen said, “You’re...glowing!”

“I...Know!” He said, he coughed. His breath began to cease.

“The mountain is glowing too,” she added.

Melanie, Christine, Robby and the rest of the people stood still, watching in amazement as the light glowed ever brighter. Blinding them, Karen closed her eyes. Russell and the rest of the soldiers that survived covered their eyes with their hands.

The mountain lit up from its foot like a beacon; the entire beasts who set foot on the mountain covered their eyes but were vaporised by the light. However, it caused no harm to the humans.

Like a lighthouse, a giant ray of light rose up straight into the sky. And the light could be seen from thousands of miles away.

The rest of the beasts that did not come close to the mountain began to run away from the light. People who could

see the light from the city and the surrounding environment on the other hand began running towards the direction of the mountain; most on foot, and some in their vehicles. Many who were in hiding came out running to the mountain.

###

To be continued...

Appreciation:

Hi, thank you for reading my book. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review?

Thanks!

Richard Shekari.

About the Author:

Richard Shekari is a novelist, lyricist, singer, and a poet from Abuja, Nigeria. A Humanitarian with the National Emergency Management Agency, Nigeria. He is an alumnus of the Federal University of Technology (ATBU) Architecture department Bauchi State, Nigeria.

Connect with me on social media:

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/therealrexford>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/richardshekari>

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/richardshekari>