

ed around at what was
ift of the room. Dirt,
ocks, bricks and mortar
were piled high where the
loor once had been. The
est of the room was in-
act. The plaster had
allen from the ceiling, but
the steel girders had held
through the quake.

"I guess we made it
through that one," he
nally said.

"Until the air runs out,"
Dale replied, "then we die
anyway, unless we can
dig out."

John suddenly felt
weak and lightheaded.
His arm was throbbing
with pain, and the shirt he
had wrapped it with was
completely soaked with
blood. He took a few
steps and sat down on the
floor to rest. Dale had
already found the butcher
knife and was using it as a
shovel to dig through the
enormous pile of rock.
John leaned against the
wall and applied pressure
to the wound in an attempt
to stop the bleeding.
Then the girl tore a long
strip of cloth from the hem
of her tattered skirt and
began to bind up the
wound. She worked
quickly and seemed to
know what she was
doing.

"Where did you learn
first aid?" John asked as
he wrapped his aching
shoulder.

"My mother was a nurse,"
she replied slowly. "I
learned from her."

It was a hard question,
but John knew he
would have to ask.

"And was she...your
mother?"

"No, they let me stay
here."

"Didn't they feed you?
You look like you haven't
eaten a thing in months..."

"I told you, they
weren't my parents. It
wasn't their responsibility.
Besides, food is scarce
these times. Even you
must know that."

When she finished
wrapping his arm, she sat
down beside him. John
studied her closely. He
was finding it very hard to
believe her story.

"Couldn't you get food
somewhere? I know it's not
much, but it's better than
starving."

"I can't get them. I'm a
fugitive, you know."

Before John could
reply, the girl threw back

her head and tossed her
hair up out of her face.
Her forehead was clean
and white. John leaned
toward her and looked
more closely in the
darkness. There was no
mistaking it. The girl had
no mark. He stared at her
in disbelief.

"I bear no mark but that
of my father," she said
quietly.

"And where are your
parents, Sue?"

"They were put in
prison about three years
ago for taking part in
a riot and refusing to take
the mark. Now I believe
they are with my father."

"How many fathers do
you have? Are your
parents with your grand-
father?"

The girl turned to face
him before answering.
Her eyes had a
mysterious glow about
them.

"I am speaking of Jesus
Christ, my Lord and
Saviour and the Father of
all creation." Her voice
became quiet. "If only I
had known Him then, as
my parents did. Then I
might be with Him even
now."

John looked at her
steadily. He knew that he
would never get out of the
hole Dale was frantically
digging—for what? Even
if he should get through
hundreds of feet of bricks
and mortar and rubble,
what then? Die of
radiation? Most likely.
Even if they should
escape and leave the
country, where would
they go? It was the same
everywhere. There was
only one thing to be sure
of...that the whole world,
the whole rotten, stinking
world, was doomed to
destruction. Somehow,
he thought, this girl, Sue,
had the answer. She was
physically starving, but
her soul was content. He
woke from his trance and
found that she was
kneeling beside him,
wrapping his legs with
some rags she had been
using as a bed.

"Won't be needing
these anymore," she said
quietly. Then she looked
into his eyes. "And what
is your name?"

"John."

"John, our time is
short. Even now I can see
His coming. That's why
I'm not afraid of this awful
world. For me there is a
way out. There can be for

you, too, if you choose to
believe. John, believe
in the Son of Man. Only
He can set us free."

"I believe," John said
slowly.

"Then, John, even if
you die tonight, you shall
be free."

Dale swung the butcher knife in a deadly arc above his head...

A sudden wave of
peace swept over him,
and he leaned back against
the wall to try to get
some sleep. But sleep
would not come. The
pain in his arm and
shoulder was too great.
He lay instead to ponder
the things that Sue had
said to him. After about
an hour he looked up and
saw Dale standing near
the place where Sue was
sleeping, holding the but-
cher knife in his hand. His
eyes had an eerie,
faraway, crazed look in
them. He was covered
with dirt and his hands
were blistered and
bleeding. John watched
him closely, trying to read
his thoughts. Then Dale's
last words flooded
out...Until the air runs
out...Then we die
anyway unless we can dig
out...Until the air runs
out...

Attacked

"Dale, no! No Dale, not
that, please, no! You're
crazy!" John found him-
self yelling as he scram-
bled to his feet, but it was
too late. Dale swung the
butcher knife in a deadly
arc above his head and let
it sink into Sue's chest
while she lay there, still
sleeping. John heard the
sickening thud and
became instantly filled
with rage. He rushed at
Dale like a madman and
swung wildly with his

good arm at what he
believed to be the face of
a demon. His blows were
intercepted by the butcher
knife until his arm was
shredded and useless.
Then Dale threw him
against the wall and began
pushing the knife into his
bare stomach. John
could feel the blade sink
deeper and deeper and
the horrible pain caused
him the scream uncon-
trollably.

Instantaneous thoughts
began to flow through his
mind. Thoughts of Sue,
dying of starvation in a
stinking hole. Thoughts of
Jesus, dying of crucifica-
tion in a stinking
world...so that he, John
Carpenter, might live. He
remembered Sue's words,
believe and you shall be
free. Free in God's
love...the ultimate
freedom. Then he felt the
ground begin to shake
beneath his feet once
more. A loud rumble that
seemed to come from the
depths of the earth began
to drown out even his
own screaming. Dale
pulled the knife and
began to back away from
him. A look of sheer
terror came over his face
once more. John could
feel his legs buckle and he
fell to the floor. The
pressure of the knife had
been holding him up. As
he lay there in a puddle of
his own warm blood,
John realized that he
no longer felt any pain.
Pain was somehow
distant and far away. It
was no longer a part of
him. He was dying. Then
another sound, much
louder than the quake it-
self, began to flow
through the air. It was soft
and mellow, yet
somehow loud and
commanding. John
thought that he might be
dreaming, but he opened
his eyes and saw that Dale
had heard the sound, too.
He was, in fact, holding
his ears and screaming.
John felt somehow called
to the sound, but his body
was incapable of even the
slightest movement. He
listened closely as the
sound began to change in
pitch and hue, like colors
flashing before his eyes.
He likened it to the sound
of a trumpet, yet
unhuman to the point of
being immortal. Yes, it was
truly immortal. The next
thought that penetrated
John's mind was borne

in the minds of every
living being on the earth at
the very same moment,
the sound of the begin-
ning of the end. Christ
was coming to reclaim
what was rightfully His
from the beginning of
time.

The Bridegroom

John felt a new strength
beginning to flow into
him. His useless mortal
body was being healed
and transformed before
his very eyes. He felt him-
self standing in response
to the call of the trumpet and
he looked across the
room, which was
strangely filled with light.
Dale was thrashing his
body wildly against the
wall, possessed with the
idea of killing himself. He
picked up the knife and
slashed his throat
repeatedly. He was ob-
viously in terrible pain, but
his body would not die.
John turned from the ugly
scene and looked at the
place where Sue had
been lying. She was not
there! Then, looking up,
he saw her. She was
standing, dressed in a
flowing robe of white, like
the most beautiful bride
he had ever laid eyes
upon. She stood still for a
moment, looking directly
into his eyes.

"Behold," she said to
him, her body trembling
with emotion, "the
Bridegroom cometh."

Then John looked and
saw that the walls, the
ceiling, the very founda-
tion that he was stand-
ing on, were crumbling.
All three of them,
however, were left un-
touched. They found
themselves suddenly
standing on level ground.

Dale was a pitiful sight.
His bloodied flesh was
nearly unrecognizable,
but he was trying to bury
himself in the earth as if to
hide. Then John turned
and looked at Sue. Her
eyes were transfixed in
the direction of the most
brilliant light that John
had ever seen. John, too,
looked into the light. And
he saw Him. His eyes
were blazing like fire, and
on his head were many
kingly crowns. He was
dressed in a robe of
red...dipped in blood.
And he was called the
Word of God, King of
Kings, and Lord of Lords.