

SEAN McDOWELL

BOB HOSTETLER



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OUTREACH®

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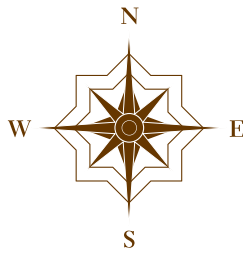
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CHAPTER 1

I didn't answer when the call came. Not the first time. I saw who was calling and I let it go to voice mail.

I tucked the phone back into my jeans pocket and, instead of climbing the wooden stairs to my one-room apartment over the Stanfield Stationery store in tiny Oxford, Ohio, I stopped in to see my friend Artie in his two-chair barber shop. It's separated from the stationery store by only the staircase to my room.

"Emma!" Artie said, without getting up from the barber chair. He dropped the open *Cincinnati Enquirer* onto his lap. "What are you doing here? And where are the Young Republicans?"

Artie always had something like that to say. We'd been friends ever since he saw me moving into my apartment. He helped me carry everything up and even bought me pizza when we were done. We hit it off from the start, though he was easily twice my age. I quickly found out he could make me smile easier than anyone else. The "Young Republicans" was one of many ways he referred to Lincoln and Linden, three-year-old twins I cared for five days a week and sometimes on weekends, depending on the their college professor parents' schedules. Usually Artie called the boys Winken and Blinken or SpongeBob and SquarePants. He didn't seem to care that SpongeBob SquarePants was not two cartoon characters but one; I'm not sure he even knew that.

"Got the day off," I answered as I sat in the empty barber chair next to the one Artie occupied. Artie's shop was like something out of an

THE QUEST

old movie. Bottles of various shapes and sizes lined the counter in front of the mirror that occupied most of the wall behind us; old magazines were strewn haphazardly on the chairs and tables that lined the opposite wall, though I'd seldom seen more than one or two people in the shop at a time. "Their mom wanted to do something with them."

"So what are you doing out and about?"

I shrugged. "Nothing."

"She didn't tell you, did she?"

"What?" I asked, trying to play dumb even though Artie could see right through me.

"Why do you put up with it?"

"Put up with what?"

"You know what I'm talking about. Professor lady never even told you about her plans. She let you show up for work and *then* told you she didn't need you to watch the Fresh Princes today."

"She apologized." I avoided his gaze by pretending to study myself in the big barbershop mirror, in the space between the outdated hardware-store calendar on one side and the newspaper clippings and comic strips taped on the other side. I tucked my long red hair behind my ears.

"I bet she did."

"She did," I said. "She said she was really sorry and would make it up to me."

The phone in my pocket jumped to life, vibrating and playing my favorite song, "Think Twice," by the band One Off. I pulled it out, looked at it, and shoved it back into my pocket.

"Avoiding some guy?" he asked.

"You know better than that," I answered. "I haven't had a date since I started working at Common Ground." I'd taken a second job at a local coffee shop about four months earlier and still couldn't pay enough of my school debts to get the bursar to unblock my student account so I could take more classes. That's a long story; I'd been

trying to pay my own tuition for the past year and a half. I told my dad—three weeks after his wedding—that I didn’t want him to pay for my schooling anymore since he was married now and had a wife to take care of. We’d had a fight on the phone. As I said, it’s a long story.

“What about that Randy guy?”

“You mean Ricky?”

“I know his name.”

“He doesn’t count.”

“I hear that. So, who are you avoiding, if not some guy?”

It took me a second to remember how this conversation started. “Oh, that,” I said, remembering the phone call. “My dad’s wife.”

He nodded slowly. “Don’t they live—”

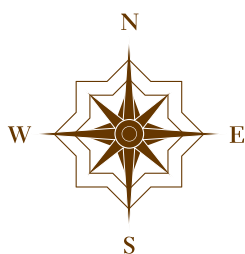
“In Israel, yeah,” I said.

He kept nodding. “But you’re not going to answer.”

“I will,” I said.

“When you’re not so busy?”

Sometimes Artie could be a real pain.



CHAPTER 2

I glanced again at my phone. My stepmother had called twice and left two voice messages—that should have gotten my attention.

It wouldn't have been that unusual for my dad to call me. Well, maybe a little, since the wedding. Dad and I had always been super close. We had to be, since my mom died when I was too young to remember.

But in my sophomore year of college, he showed up one day outside my dorm, McCracken Hall. When I saw him, I ran to him so fast I dropped my books; they went everywhere. I left them lying there in the autumn leaves while I wrapped my arms around his neck and hugged him as tightly as I could.

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I want to take my blue-eyed beanpole to lunch. Is there anything wrong with that?”

So he helped me gather my books and drove me uptown to the Common Ground Café, where I ordered a turkey and cheese on toast, and he just had a cup of black coffee. I could tell something was on his mind—I always could read him like a book. But I was so happy to see him, I didn't mind waiting for him to get around to what he wanted to say. It didn't take him long.

“I've met someone,” he said.

I waited. I thought it was just his way of starting a story, you know, like, “I've met someone, and he owns a New York art gallery, and

THE QUEST

he said he'd be willing to display some of your drawings," or, "I've met someone who flies a private plane back and forth from Ohio to New Jersey, and she's willing to fly you home for Thanksgiving and Christmas." But this wasn't *that* kind of "I've met someone." It was the other kind.

"Her name is Katya," he continued. "You're going to like her."

I immediately took a bite of my turkey and cheese and just nodded and chewed for a few moments. I had *not* expected this. I didn't know how to react. I didn't even know what I was feeling. I was feeling something, just nothing good.

"I feel like I have so much to tell you. She's a wonderful woman, Em. You're going to love her. She's warm, intelligent, sophisticated. She has a great sense of humor and is so much fun to be with."

"Huh," I said. It was all I could think to say.

"We met through an online dating service and we spent weeks exchanging e-mails before we had our first date at Little Anthony's in the theater district, in Manhattan. We talked for hours, Em, until the restaurant staff had to ask us to leave because they were closing!"

I tried to smile.

"And get this," he continued. "She's a writer. She's written more than a dozen books. That's pretty cool, huh?"

I nodded.

He produced his cell phone. "Here's her picture." He handed it to me.

I took it. Pretended to be interested. Handed it back. "She's pretty."

"Oh, she is. Absolutely gorgeous, five-ten, forty-one, and just four years younger than me. Beautiful in every way."

He looked so happy, smiling at me like a kid who's just heard the words "Disney World." I wanted to be happy with him—for him. So I tried, I really did. I asked him, "What kind of books does she write?"

"Christian books," he said.

"Christian books?" Had I heard him right?

“Yeah, like books on praying and faith and things like that.”

“Christian books.” I couldn’t make his answer register. It felt a little like the way I felt when I used a word that Lincoln and Linden didn’t understand. Their expressions would freeze. They would tilt their little heads and just blink at me.

Dad and I had never been religious. He raised me just fine without religion. He took me to the theater, the symphony, concerts, and art exhibits, but the only time we ever entered a church was for weddings and funerals. I couldn’t picture my dad with a woman who went to church. I couldn’t picture my dad with a woman, period.

He nodded. “I know it’s shocking. But that’s just the beginning, Beany.” That’s how he sometimes shortened his favorite nickname for me.

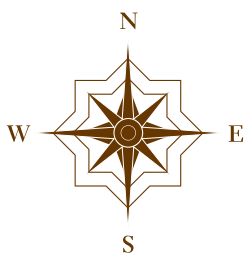
“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Katya has introduced me to God, Beany. She’s changed my life. Actually, God’s changed my life, but she’s played a big part in that process.”

“What do you mean, she introduced you to God? You don’t even believe in God.”

“You’re right, I didn’t, but now I do. I not only believe in him, I’ve come to know him ... and love him.”

I stood up—so suddenly that I knocked over my chair. It fell backward and hit the floor with a loud thud.



CHAPTER 3

KATYA'S JOURNAL

Emma's still not answering. Maybe she's busy with the children. Maybe she's avoiding me. I wish there was a way to let her know how urgent this is without leaving a message that will scare her. Maybe that's not possible. If she doesn't call me back soon, I may have no choice but to tell her that way. I hope it doesn't come to that.

I don't even know if I'm doing the right thing to call her now. It could still turn out to be nothing, but with each passing hour, that seems less and less likely. And I'm afraid I've already waited too long to contact her. But, really, what can she do? What can I do? What can anyone do, when we don't know anything yet.

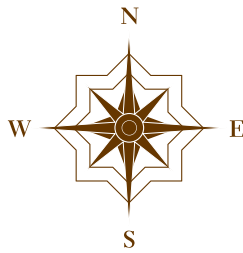
I'm afraid, God, so afraid. It's been three days, and this isn't exactly the safest place on earth. I feel alone. I know you're here. I know that. At least I'm doing my best to know that. And there are others, like Tom and Stella, available to help. But Daniel's not here and I feel that emptiness so strongly. This little apartment is filled with his absence.

It's so hard to wait, so hard to not knowing, and so hard to think, or pray, even. I don't want to be

THE QUEST

consumed by worry ... or fear. I want to trust you, God. I know that trusting you is the only way I can get through this. I'm sorry for all those times I've ever responded to people who were hurting with glib and easy answers about trusting you through tough times, dark times. I know that trusting you is my only hope and my only choice right now. I am grateful for the blessing of faith and the benefit of prayer—when I can pray. I don't know how people make it through, otherwise. I don't know how Emma will.

But you do. You know all things. So I guess I'll just leave it with you. So work things out, Lord. Let Emma return my calls or answer the next time I try. And somehow, somehow, get me through this night.



CHAPTER 4

I didn't even stop to pick up the chair from the floor. I had to get out of there, if only for a few minutes to catch my breath, so I locked myself in the women's restroom at the café.

It was too much. First, my dad tells me that he's met some woman and that she's a religious freak, and *then* he tells me that he's become some kind of religious freak, too? It felt like a betrayal—of what, I don't know, but Dad and I had always been so close. We did everything together, just the two of us most of the time. He was the best dad a kid could ever have. He taught me how to climb a tree, ride a bike, drive a car, ski, and dance. He taught me everything important, and he never taught me to believe in God. He used to say that religion was a lot like alcohol or drugs—it intensifies human personalities. You know, like if a person was generally good, religion sometimes made them better; but if a person was mostly bad, religion usually made them worse. But he always said I didn't need religion because I was already the best person he'd ever met.

I knew he was biased about me, of course, so I didn't take his words all that seriously. But it still felt awful for him to say he had a new woman in his life and that she had guided him to God or whatever. Didn't he know how that would make me feel? Couldn't he see how that was like a knife in my heart? The only way it could be any worse was if he—

The thought stopped my breath. I stared at my reflection in the restroom mirror. It wasn't possible. He had flown from New Jersey to Ohio to tell me that he had met some woman and that she was a

THE QUEST

religious person and now he was, too. Right? That was enough to drop on me in one afternoon, right? He couldn't possibly ...

I marched out of the ladies' room. I was so focused on getting to my dad's table that I would have knocked aside a girl headed in my direction if she hadn't stepped out of the way at the last second. I saw her shaking her head at me as I passed, but I didn't care. I reached the table as my dad set down his coffee and looked up, a concerned expression on his face turning to apprehension.

"Are you getting married?" I said.

He didn't answer immediately, which he would have, if the answer had been no. So I knew. It was true. He was getting married.

"Sit down, Emma. Please?" he said.

I sat. He reached across the table to grab my hands. I put them in my lap.

"I haven't asked her yet, but I'm going to. I haven't mentioned it to anyone else. You're the first."

"When?"

"I plan to ask her next weekend."

"I mean when are you getting married?" This was insane. It was too much, too sudden, too fast.

He moved to the chair beside me, leaned in close, and put his hand on my hands.

"I know this is a lot, Beany. I've wrestled with how to tell you. I wanted you to know, but I didn't want to tell you any of this on the phone. That just didn't seem right. But there's still so much to tell you, I've only just scratched the surface, and I know it's overwhelming, but—"

"When are you getting married?" I repeated.

He leaned back in the chair and withdrew his hand. "Emma, please don't be angry. I want you to be happy for me."

"I will," I lied. "I'll be ecstatic for you. Just tell me when you're getting married."

He shot me his chastened puppy-dog look that never failed to make me laugh ... or cry. But this time it did fail. He inhaled slowly, then sighed. "I'm hoping we can do it while you're home for Christmas. A small wedding, just a few friends."

Just two months away. Not even that. Less than two months. Oh, God.

I stood again, this time keeping the chair from falling. I kissed his forehead—quickly, so as not to give him the chance to hug me. I knew I was being a jerk, but I didn't care.

"That's fine," I said. "I'll be there." I told him I needed to get my books out of his car because I had to get to class. He said he'd drop me off. I told him I'd walk.

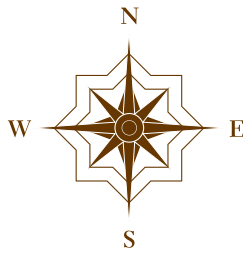
From the Bloomfield Daily News

Hopkins/Seeger

Katya Marianna Hopkins and Daniel Drake Seeger were married Saturday in a ceremony at Bethany Community Church in Verona. The Rev. Robert Helwig officiated. The couple was attended by the groom's daughter, Emma and the bride's sister, Elena.

The bride, who will take her husband's name, graduated from Wesleyan University and is the author of 13 inspirational books. The bridegroom is a vice president for operations at Dressler Insurance in Manhattan. He is a graduate of Rutgers University and Fairleigh-Dickinson University, where he earned a master's degree in business administration. Mr. Seeger was a widower prior to his marriage to Ms. Hopkins.

The couple live in Bloomfield.



CHAPTER 5

I know I shouldn't have treated my dad so badly that day in the café. I apologized on the phone a few days later and things returned more or less to normal, at least as far as I let on to him. And I went to the wedding on December 23. It ruined my Christmas that year. Who am I kidding? It ruined my life.

I know that sounds like a drama queen, but it's not. I tried really hard to smile and act as if I was happy for my dad. I tried to like Katya. Dad was right; she is really beautiful, but that's just one more reason to dislike her.

She fell all over herself trying to be nice to me. She came with Dad to pick me up at Newark Airport; she insisted that I sit in front with him on the drive home while she sat in back. When I went up to my room to unpack, there was a gift box on my bed—a pretty birthstone bracelet and a note from her:

“Emma, thank you for accepting me into your family and for your kindness in being a part of our wedding. Your father has raised an exceptional young woman, and you have played a primary role in making him the man he is today! I am so looking forward to many happy years with him ... and with you.”

But the nicer she was, the less I felt as if I could tell her or Dad how hurt I was that I'd been replaced—and that Dad was so different from before. It sounds selfish, right? But all my life, Dad and I had had each other; now he had *her*, and I had ... who?

THE QUEST

I didn't call Katya back, and I didn't listen to her voice messages. But when my phone rang again after I'd left Artie's and gone up to my apartment, I figured I might as well get it over with and I answered it.

"Emma, I'm so glad I finally reached you." The connection wasn't the greatest, but Katya's voice was clear enough.

"Yeah, sorry about that. I just got home." I sat down on my double bed, the largest piece of furniture in the room—which isn't saying much because the only other furnishings were an upright dresser with four drawers, a small easy chair that swivels and rocks, and an end table between the bed and chair.

"Thank you so much for answering."

"Sure," I said.

"I am so sorry to tell you this over the phone, but I can't think of any other way."

"What? Tell me what?" You know how people say "My heart skipped a beat"? That's exactly what happened. Only it was more like four or five beats. "Is it Dad? Is my dad okay?"

"Yes," she quickly answered. "I mean, I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It suddenly felt as if I was in one of those television crime-show episodes. "What's going on?"

"Your father is missing," she said. "I haven't seen him for three days. He left on Monday to go to a new community where we've been getting to know some of the people, and he never came home that evening."

"What? And you're just calling me now?" Six months after their wedding, Dad made another trip to see me in Ohio. I'd had to stop taking classes by that time and was renting the small walkup over the stationery store. He said that he and Katya had decided to move to Israel to be some kind of missionaries. They rented out the house in New Jersey to some friends, packed some clothes, and left everything else behind—me included.

“I didn’t think much of it at first. Sometimes he can’t get cell service or he has to stay overnight with someone if a border crossing closed.”

I had no idea what she was talking about. Only that she had said my father was missing.

“But when he didn’t call or come home the next day, I started to get concerned.”

“Did you call the police?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, I contacted the police yesterday, and they promised to look into it, of course. I’ve also contacted our agency office, so they are doing everything they can for us—for him.”

I sat down. Tears started to flow and my hands were shaking. “What—I don’t understand.” I fought to control my emotions. I was losing. “How could this happen?”

“Don’t panic, Emma. I don’t want to upset you. I wasn’t even sure I should call you. I just thought it best to tell you.”

“He must be hurt or—or something. If he was all right, he would call you.”

“He would call me if he could, yes. But it’s not always possible.”

“Do you think he’s okay?”

“I—I hope so. But I don’t know.”

“But what if he’s hurt or—?”

“I don’t want to think about that right now, and you shouldn’t, either. I’d rather do everything I can to find out what’s happened and leave the worrying for later.”

“What am I supposed to do? I can’t do anything from over here. You’ve taken him half a world away from me.”

Katya was silent for a few moments. Finally, she said, “I’m sorry, Emma. I know this is hard. I hope I did the right thing by calling you.”

It was my turn to be silent. I couldn’t believe this was happening. I didn’t know what to do. I felt so powerless—and alone.

CHAPTER 6

KATYA'S JOURNAL

My conversation with Emma didn't go the way I wanted it to. But I suppose there's no good way to share that kind of news—or to hear it.

It's hard enough to be here in Jerusalem while my husband is missing. It has to be impossibly hard to get a phone call from half a world away and hear that kind of news about your father. Not knowing anything and not being able to do anything is the hardest part of it all. And for Emma, it is certainly much worse, infinitely worse.

God, I know that wherever Daniel is, you are on the job no less than you were before this current situation. But it doesn't feel that way. And Emma doesn't know these things. She is alone, miles and miles away from here, and I imagine she feels even more powerless than I do at the moment.

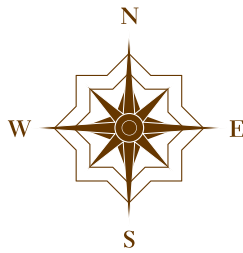
I don't know what I can possibly do for her from this distance, other than to keep her informed as much as possible. But I would love the opportunity, Lord. I would welcome the chance to discuss the things that really matter with her. If you would open that door for me, I would be so grateful.

In the meantime, Lord, please draw close to her. Surround her with the support of friends during this difficult time. Give her a strong friend, a faithful friend, to help her process all of this and cope with it. And supply what is lacking in her relationships, Lord, please. If there is no one in her daily life to give her spiritual counsel, send someone her way, place someone

THE QUEST

in her path, someone who can answer questions and give her hope.

Reach out to her in her fear and panic and bring her peace and comfort, whether or not she knows the source. Strengthen her for whatever the coming day—or days—may bring and while you're at it, please do the same for me. Amen.



CHAPTER 7

When I finished talking with Katya, I sat on the edge of my bed and let the tears come. I don't know how long I cried, but if anyone ever cried enough to be able to float away on a river of their own tears, it was me.

From as far back as I could remember, being in control of things was important to me—maybe more important than anything. When I was a toddler, I would arrange my dolls in a row on my bed, against the wall. It became a nightly ritual to take them off the bed and line them up carefully on top of the toy box in the corner, as well as in front of it. I don't know why it never occurred to me to find a place where they could stay in place. Maybe the comfort I felt from neatly arranging them over and over was the point.

In kindergarten, I did the same thing with crayons. I wouldn't start coloring until all my crayons were arrayed by color on my table. I liked the way they looked, all neat and colorful and ready for action.

Once I started driving, I always wanted to be—had to be, more or less—the one behind the wheel. Only on short trips would I let my friends drive me anywhere, and then only rarely. Sometimes I even said no to some party or get-together if it meant someone else would drive. Sounds silly, I know, but it really wasn't that big a deal. It didn't control me, if that's what you're thinking. I just felt better when I could control a situation. I still do.

So when Dad told me he was getting married ... to a religious nut ... and that he'd gotten religion, too, the most important thing about

THE QUEST

the situation was that I was losing my dad. But it also felt as if I was totally losing control. And then when he told me they were going overseas and wouldn't even be as close as New Jersey—as if I wasn't already far enough away, being in Ohio and all—well, there was nothing I could do about that, either.

But now, this was maddening. I was terrified. I felt alone. Powerless. Panic-stricken. And, maybe worst of all, I was—what? Six thousand miles away from my dad, and no one had heard from him in three days. I could do nothing, absolutely nothing, about it. Who could I call? Where could I go? What could I do?

From the Israel News Service website

Arnona Resident Reported Missing

 EMAIL  PRINT  + SHARE

An American citizen and resident of Arnona in southern Jerusalem was reported missing.

Katya Seeger, the wife of Daniel Seeger, filed a police report after Mr. Seeger had been missing for more than 48 hours. Mr. Seeger reportedly left home in his car, a white 2009 Hyundai Getz, on Monday morning and was expected to return that evening. On Wednesday morning, Mrs. Seeger filed a report with the missing persons bureau of the Department of Investigations and Prosecution at the Israel Police Central Headquarters.

Each year the police receive about 5,000 missing persons reports. According to police superintendent Yair Levi, head of the missing persons division, most turn up on their own and their names are removed from the list. However, 20 to 50 names remain on the list each year, causing the number of current missing-person cases to grow to more than 500.

Mr. and Mrs. Seeger are both employed by the Jerusalem branch of the Sar Shalom Institute.



EVERYONE IS SEARCHING. NOT EVERYONE KNOWS IT.

A single phone call launches twenty-three-year-old Emma Seeger on the journey of a lifetime. And it turns out to be a more dangerous—and more consequential—journey than she could have imagined ... or feared.

The call is from the woman Emma despises most in the world—her father's wife, Emma's stepmother, a woman who had taken away Emma's father. Not once. Not twice. Three times. She had turned Daniel Seeger into a “born-again” Christian, married him, and dragged him off to Israel, where they worked as some sort of missionaries—an occupation Emma views as misguided, if not outright dangerous.

Now Emma learns her father has disappeared in the midst of escalating political tension and violence. After early efforts to find him prove fruitless, Emma embarks on an odyssey filled with adventure, frustration, danger, and an unlikely partner—her stepmother, Katya, whose faith alternately repulses and intrigues Emma. Their conflicting personalities and competing beliefs could even endanger the success of the one thing they have in common: their shared goal of finding Daniel and returning him to safety.

***WILL THEY COME TOGETHER TO RESCUE HIM
BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE? OR WILL THEIR
GREATEST FEARS BE REALIZED?***

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