

The Evil Ones

by Allan C. Stover

CHAPTER ONE

We are certain that we are of God, but all the world is in the power of the evil one.

(1 John 5:19)

The day Matt Daniels disappeared into the north began as a typical New Hampshire spring day soon after the beginning of the second term of President Joseph Franklin Coulson. The air was crisp, the maple trees in his front yard swayed like green sails in the spring wind, and yellow daffodils had pushed through the soil of the flowerbed in front of the modest brick home where he lived with Marian and their two children, Tommy and Melanie.

It was a spring day that would live in history.

By the end of the twenty-first century, historians would still disagree when it all began. Most agreed that conditions that led to the Darkness began long before President Coulson took office. Milestones along the way—asset forfeiture laws, judicial activism, public land grabs, bureaucratic abuses, abortion, hate crime laws, school prayer restrictions, educational decline, gun control, political correctness, and so many others—should have warned Americans of the spreading malevolence of government power over their lives.

The sieges of Waco and Ruby Ridge were major turning points. The general public witnessed brutal attacks on civilians, witnessed the cover-up by almost everyone involved, from left-wing politicians and government employees to activist judges and journalists, and they did nothing. Later, they reelected the most corrupt President in American history, saw the disgraceful sellout by their elected representatives during his

impeachment trial, and again did nothing. They stifled a yawn and went on with their lives.

The Washington power structure was elated at how easily the "unwashed masses" could be manipulated. They had created a monster—their monster—and it gave them increasingly more power over docile America citizens. President Coulson's executive orders implementing the Stansfield Amendment signaled that the monster was more active than ever.

Long before the Darkness was imposed on the citizens of the American Province, the esteemed Arthur Parker warned in his journal what would happen to America. "Few Americans understand that a government can impose any tyranny it wishes if it does so in small steps accompanied by a subtle media propaganda campaign. The general public will accept any change if it is gradual enough and the propaganda is well done.

"The obvious question is, When will it all end? What do we find at the bottom of this steep slope on which we find ourselves sliding always downward?"

That Saturday morning, Matt awoke early and pulled on a pair of Levi's and his Rockports, then called his brother, Jeremy. Marian wanted Jeremy to pick up some smoked fish for hors d'oeuvres that evening from a store near his antique shop on UN World Friendship Highway. Jeremy ate dinner with them every Saturday and usually brought the hors d'oeuvres they nibbled on while they watched sports on television.

Jeremy's phone rang continuously. "He doesn't answer," Matt called down to Marian. "Not even his cell phone. That's not like him. Even his answering machine is off. Something's wrong, really wrong." He clenched the phone, each ring tightening a screw

of fear in his gut. Reluctantly, as though a vacuum had held the phone to his ear, he pulled it away and gently put it down.

"Maybe he had to run to the store," Marian called up from the kitchen. "Better hurry or the kids will be late to their swimming lesson."

He shook his head. With Jeremy, there was no way he would be anywhere but in his own store. "He opens in ten minutes. Jeremy's too organized to wait until the last minute to run to the store." He pulled on a white sports shirt and blue down jacket and hurried down the steps. The down jacket had a black stripe on the back where a "bird rights" protester had spray painted it a month earlier outside a mall.

Tommy and Melanie waited at the door with that half-bored, half-expectant look that eight-and nine-year-olds display when they perform such mundane tasks as waiting for Daddy to take them to a swimming lesson. "Come on, kids." He rushed past them to the door, tousling the hair of each one as he went by. They fell silently in step behind him. Tommy had Marian's jet-black hair and Matt's dimpled chin and chiseled features. Melanie had Matt's dark brown hair and Marian's soft features. To them, his tender touch had become routine, the gesture of a loving father. To him, the touch was almost electric, as though he communicated his love to them each time though the touch of his hand.

His family was his life, and he worked hard to make their lives safe and secure. He vowed his children would never experience the continuous gut-wrenching fear he had experienced growing up on a tough street in Cleveland with a father who was in and out of prison, and a drug-addicted mother who somehow abstained from drugs Sunday mornings to take her children to church. Matt's childhood fears had grown into a cursed

adult fear, a legacy of his wretched childhood that twenty years later could still give him nightmares and immobilize him when life got stressful.

He looked back at his children, their eyelids half shut, their mouths half open as though they were only halfway into the daytime world after a nighttime of dreams and deep sleep. Tommy had braces on his teeth, an oddity among children then. When he was born, new medical tests revealed he was an "imperfect birth fetus" and could have dental problems someday. Doctors had advised Matt and Marian to get rid of Tommy to avoid the future expense. They had refused. The law had evolved since the twentieth century to allow parents twenty-eight days after birth to hand over their birth fetuses to a "birth annulment center" where they were kept until they ceased functioning and were sent for disposal. They weren't legally called babies until after the twenty-eight day annulment period.

Marian walked into the hallway wearing a white terrycloth bathrobe and smelling of soap from her morning shower. "Are you leaving now, honey?" she asked. He nodded. The sight and scent of her still excited him. Her silky black hair, which fell to her shoulders, was still damp. Her face was smooth and fresh, with wide-open brown eyes and naturally long lashes. Matt was convinced that everyone could see her inner warmth and goodness glowing in her face. She was what people in the mid-twentieth century would call a good woman, but would later be called boring. Matt never found her boring. He felt he had attracted Marian's attention in college only because better men who could have been his competitors pursued women they thought were more exciting. "It was their loss," he often told Jeremy.

"Bye, dear," she said as she kissed him at the door. Her mouth tasted of toothpaste. "Please drive carefully." She said it every time he left the house.

He always answered the same way. "Thanks for the reminder. I was planning to drive carelessly." It was a private joke. He paused at the door and glanced back at her, worry lines etched into his forehead. "I have to drive up to see what's happened to Jeremy." Jeremy was surely fine, he thought. He had to be. Matt couldn't survive without him.

Matt opened the door and fished in his pockets for his car keys as he stepped outside. His house was on a quiet cul-de-sac. Jeremy had helped him select it. Jeremy was always there when Matt made a decision or faced a crisis.

Matt and Marian were the only married man-woman couple on the street. Ruth Corrigan, who lived down the street, had been married to Ted, but the government had arrested him for something the year before and seized his elegant restaurant, so she lived alone with her daughter, Maria. Maria was Melanie's age and a frequent visitor at the Daniels's house.

Matt dropped the children at the community center. "Your mom will pick you up in an hour, kids. Be sure to come right out after your lesson." He headed toward his computer repair business. Technically, it was Marian's business. They had to register it in her name to get a 5F classification for female ownership from the federal Department of Minority Rights. That classification granted a thirty-percent reduction in federal, state, and local taxes. How else could he have stayed in business with the oppressive tax burden? Marian had applied for a rating increase to 10FH based on a Spanish great-

grandparent, but officials rejected her application because "applicant lacks sufficient minority blood to qualify."

Matt pulled into the empty parking lot of The Computer Complex five minutes before his scheduled opening at eight, his rusting blue Chevy creaking and hissing. Marian drove the year-old white Lincoln he had bought her a few months before as a surprise on their tenth anniversary. Not being fussy about the finer things in life, he was content with what he called his "point-A-to-point-B car."

John, his technician and friend, was waiting. A giant of a man with large hands, wild red hair, and a ruddy complexion, he looked more like a truck driver or construction worker than a computer technician. He was the best computer hardware and software technician Matt had ever known. He and Matt nodded to each other, their usual silent morning greeting.

"I may have to leave," Matt said after he unlocked the door. Inside, computers littered the counter that divided the store in two. A workbench, desk, and chairs were the only other furniture in the cramped store. "I've been calling Jeremy all morning to confirm dinner tonight but there's no answer. Oh, you're invited, too. Nothing fancy, probably casserole. Marian will put the casserole in about five, so we'll close early."

John nodded. He ate every night at Double-T diner, and while the food was good there, he appreciated the change when Matt invited him over on Saturdays. "Brothers can be a pain, old buddy," John said. "Mine is. Even though I'm his only relative, he refuses to talk to me. But Jeremy's the most reliable guy I know. I swear he's even organized his bathroom schedule."

Matt smiled. "That's Jeremy. He should have the store open by now." He dialed Jeremy's number, but the phone rang without an answer. The answering machine with Jeremy's droning voice announcing store hours still didn't come on. Matt shook off the familiar fear that now arose within him. "No answer. I should go up there."

"Don't you have a meeting with that agent from OPCA?" OPCA, Office for the Prevention of Corporate Abuse, investigated small and unincorporated businesses as often as it did large corporations. Business owners joked that the government demonized "greedy, heartless corporations" to divert attention from its own greedy, heartless abuses. Matt never understood what was wrong with making a profit, but it seemed to carry a stigma in America. "It hasn't always been that way," Arthur Parker once told him. "It used to be that any person who worked hard and became successful was honored, not stigmatized."

Matt had three other employees who had been forced on him who didn't work at all. The Department of Minority Rights forced each business to hire a number of Disadvantaged Persons based on its gross income. It was rumored that the government did so to keep the official unemployment rate from rising to an embarrassing high. "Those DP's are able-bodied and capable of working," John often grumbled during payday. "I don't understand why they're classified as DP's. They show up here all drugged up, and we have to treat them with special care, or we get into trouble. Romello carries that pistol, and he's pulled it on me twice, but I can't raise my voice or take the gun away or cuss him out, or I'll be guilty of a hate crime. Why can he have a gun and I can't? It seems everyone else has extra rights except us." DP's were required to show up for work only to pick up a paycheck. That spring day was payday.

Matt looked at his notepad. "Well, you're right. OPCA's scheduled for ten."

"Well, boss man, that means we'll be lucky if he's here by eleven. Those bureaucrats operate on their own schedules. They're always late, if they even show up at all." At the workbench, he turned on a computer.

"I know. And the law says I have to wait for him no matter how late he is. I don't want to antagonize them again. You remember what happened the last time I got a bureaucrat upset at me, just because Tommy struck out his son twice in Little League."

John nodded. "Yeah, he sent you forty certified notices to appear, and inspectors stopped by here every day for two months. You don't want to get a bureaucrat mad if he has any power over you. The retaliation can be brutal." His huge fingers glided over the keyboard of the computer like the fingers of a pianist. Matt often marveled that such meaty fingers could so delicately tap in computer code without an error.

"I know the reason for the meeting. I'm going to be fined for asking Romello to stay here a couple of hours to hand out paychecks last week. It's against the law for me to require a DP to work, but you were sick that day, and I had to go to the OPCA office for a hearing. I offered to pay him double time. Look, I should have enough time to go up to Jeremy's place and get back before the OPCA guy shows up." He checked his watch. "I wanted to pick up the pistol I dropped off for repair yesterday, but I won't have time." He had hoped to take the pistol home that morning. With the rising rate of home invasions by local hoodlums, he wanted Marian to have a gun in the house for protection. As things worked out, he may have been lucky he didn't have the time to get the gun.

Matt was unpopular in his neighborhood not only because he had "the old kind of marriage," but also because he owned a business. Government public service ads labeled

people who owned private businesses as "often greedy and abusive, like the robber barons of a previous century." They implied that only the government was pure of motive and dedicated to the welfare of the people.

Matt Daniels didn't consider himself greedy and abusive. He thought of himself as an ordinary citizen. Except for the perplexing, immobilizing fear that had often swept through him since childhood, making even ordinary decisions difficult without Jeremy's help, he probably was ordinary. He was a man of average build and abilities, and a bit above average intelligence and looks. He worked hard and ignored the rest of the world. People told him he resembled Mel Gibson in the movie *Braveheart*, an old movie about the fight for Scottish independence that still enjoyed much popularity in late-night reruns. The old movies had high ratings because the newer movies all droned on and on with subtle "messages" from the producers' complicated political agendas. Viewers soon turned to movies with less political blather.

Matt got involved in politics only once. When his old friend, Walter Keyes, called him from Massachusetts and begged him to help in his campaign against incumbent Congressman Emmett Stansfield, the author of the Stansfield Amendment, Matt couldn't refuse. He and Walt had been close friends since college, which Walt had attended on a football scholarship. Walt had graduated third in his class before going on to law school. He had been a tall, muscular running back who could be counted on to eke out extra yardage when the team needed it. He was also a hopeless romantic who played matchmaker to Matt and Marian, for which Matt was eternally grateful.

"I'm losing in the campaign," he had told Matt. "I can't attract enough volunteers. The local papers have skewered me for being a conservative black. My supporters are

afraid of the stigma of helping in my campaign." He paused, then tentatively pleaded, "Can you help me?"

Matt was normally placid, oblivious to anything outside of his small world of family, friends, and business. It wasn't in his character to be outraged about anything, but he was outraged by the racist notion that all black politicians should think and act alike while white politicians were allowed widely divergent views. Radical activists and their cohorts in the late twentieth century had almost destroyed Clarence Thomas during his Supreme Court nomination hearing simply because he was conservative. "I'll be there in two days and help you beat Stansfield by a landslide," Matt said with uncharacteristic determination.

He left his computer shop in John's capable hands. For a month, he worked furiously in Walt's campaign office, snatching a few hours of sleep a night in Walt's house. The other campaign workers jokingly called him Braveheart because of his looks and determination. After Walt lost, Matt returned to his quiet existence in the small town of Vickersburg.

Read the words of the great men who founded our nation, and you will know what America is all about. Thomas Jefferson said, "All that is necessary for freedom to perish is for good people to do nothing." George Washington said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people." Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death." Thomas Jefferson said, "Government can do something for the people only in proportion as it can do something to the people." When Ben Franklin was asked what the Founding Fathers had given to Americans, he replied, "A republic if you can keep it." We were blessed to have so many great men leading our nation at a time when a fledgling

America really needed them. If Americans would carefully read and heed the inspiring words of our Founding Fathers, we need never fear a tyranny again.

Unfortunately, the priceless advice of the greatest men in history must compete for the attention of the general public with morally bankrupt television shows, the blather of liberal journalists, the anti-American teachings of leftist educators and their unions, and the deceptive propaganda of radical activist groups. Sadly, the priceless advice usually loses out. (Journal of Arthur Parker)

The Dolor Antique Shop was a small wooden structure on UN World Friendship Highway inside the township of Widsbury, a 40-minute drive north of Vickersburg. As always, Matt was in a rush and exceeded the speed limit, slowing down when he approached Widsbury because Police Chief Bo Williams had his men maintain an around-the-clock radar trap on the highway. "It's a great revenue enhancer," Williams boasted when citizens complained about using police officers to issue tickets rather than control crime in Widsbury. "The fines and the forfeiture money really add to the police budget."

As Matt approached Widsbury, he noticed the smell of smoke, but it was a smell unlike the pleasant scent of a clandestine wood fire or burning leaves he might expect there. It was a harsh smell like that of burning oil, a stench that irritated the nostrils and burned the eyes. The familiar fear that awakened him in a sweat some nights, the fear he had never revealed to another human except Jeremy, began to overwhelm him. Only Jeremy knew of the fear, understood it.

Matt shook his head and tried to concentrate on driving. "A few minutes to find out what's wrong," he muttered, fear almost choking his words, "and I should make it back in

time for the OPCA appointment." As he rounded the curve before Jeremy's antique shop, he beheld the scene that would haunt him the rest of his life.

There was no shop. A pile of smoking ash covered the ground where the quaint two-story roadside shop once stood. He clutched the steering wheel and tried to scream, but his throat tightened, and the word he formed with his mouth was caught deep within him.

"Jeremmy!" he finally screamed. He stumbled from the car toward the pile of gray ash that had once been his brother's home and business. "Jeremy!" he screamed again, as though expecting Jeremy to emerge from somewhere and patiently explain that this was a scheduled event, that he had planned it all in his usual organized way, that he was all right, and Matt could go back to Vickersburg and continue living his quiet life.

But Jeremy didn't emerge from anywhere. Matt frantically ran around the smoking pile shouting Jeremy's name, ignoring the acrid smoke that reddened his eyes. He ran into the woods, hoping to find Jeremy there, but saw only scraps of damp newspapers and old cans that had been thrown from cars speeding by on the highway.

Fear overwhelmed him, and he sank to his knees on the damp forest floor. Tears flooded his eyes. "Jeremy," he sobbed, "where are you? Oh, God, where is my brother?"

He suddenly stopped. "The Bartons. They'll know." The Bartons lived along the highway a few hundred yards past the antique store. Their house was nestled amongst the oak and pine trees that also surrounded Jeremy's shop. They were an older, jovial couple who shared with Jeremy a preference for an organized life. The Bartons had grown up in wealthy families and were accustomed to organization. Jeremy had grown up in poverty and chaos, and his yearning for some shred of stability in his life had driven him to

fashion a lifestyle many saw as quirky. Jeremy and the Bartons dined together at six every Friday night of the year at Le Cordon Restaurant in Widsbury. Matt had joined them a few years before and enjoyed the relaxed, friendly manner of Jean and Sam Barton.

Matt forced himself to his feet. He stumbled down the highway and pounded on their door. Jean Barton spoke to him through the closed door. "What do you want?"

"I'm Matt, Jeremy's brother. Where's Jeremy?"

"I don't know. Go away."

"Please open up. Help me. Do you know what happened to Jeremy?"

"We know nothing. Go away." She turned the double bolt in the door.

He pounded again on the door. "Why won't you help me? I can't find my brother. Please help me. What happened? Where did he go? Is he alive?" He began to sob. "Help me, for God's sake."

"We can't help you," Sam said gently from behind the door. "I've called the police. Better ask them."

"Please don't tell them you know us," Jean pleaded.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. (The Declaration of Independence)

Bo Williams had been police chief of Widsbury for almost ten years, and he fit the image of a small town police chief. His paunch had grown an inch every year he was in

office. He had a round face that would soften when he spoke to constituents and harden when he confronted a suspected criminal or someone he didn't like. His ill-fitting police uniform was stretched tight in the stomach, where the buttons threatened to pop under the strain, but hung loose around the chest. He was generally an honest man but had a fondness for the luxurious trappings of office. He was grateful for the RICO asset forfeiture laws and the Stansfield Amendment for giving him the opportunity to confiscate the Cadillac he drove as a staff car, and the antique furniture he had seized from another antique store down the road and placed in his office.

He had tried to stop the U. S. Special Security Service troopers and UN Anti-Gun Peace Force soldiers from destroying the Dolor Antique Shop. He didn't mind that the SSS and UNAPF had destroyed the place; he just wished he could have first seized a Louis XVI table he had wanted for a corner of his office.

Now he faced the sobbing, trembling brother of the man he had helped kill a couple of hours before, and whose cremated remains were now resting amongst the smoldering ruins of his shop. The fire had been so intense, being fed by the dry wood of the store and antique furniture and the chemicals used in the business, that Jeremy Daniels's body was probably just part of the pile of ashes that remained.

Bo Williams had faced a few relatives like this since President Coulson signed the executive orders establishing the SSS, allowing UNAPF into the country, and implementing portions of the proposed Stansfield Amendment. Most were like this man, in a state of disbelief and too stunned to do anything about their loss. "Your brother is dead," Bo said simply. "There's nothing left of him or the shop. Better go on home."

Matt shook his head as though to throw off the thought that his beloved Jeremy was gone. Jeremy had been his guide through life, his only anchor of stability, the big brother who protected him on Hough Avenue, put him through college, helped him open his business, and supported him financially until the business began to turn a profit. "He can't be dead. Not Jeremy. I need him." His body began to shake.

"Sorry, buddy. He's dead."

"Why? How did he die?" He leaned against the police car. Fear rose within him, and he couldn't stop shaking. His legs felt as though they would give way under him.

"The SSS and UNAPF came to see him this morning. When they entered his living quarters, he pulled a gun."

Matt shook his head. "He let them in while he held a gun?"

"He didn't let them in. The no-knock law. They broke down the door. It's the tactic they use when the registration records show a gun on the premises. It's for their safety." The no-knock law wasn't always invoked; the local SSS commander made the decision on whether or not to knock first.

Matt covered his eyes with a trembling hand, as though to block out what had happened that day. "They shot him? Just like that?"

Bo Williams shook his head. "Naw, they retreated when they saw the gun. They set up a field of fire from outside to disable him because he didn't come out to surrender. Standard procedure for their protection. The UNAPF rifle grenades started the fire."

Matt stood there, unsure what to do next. He wanted to cry out, to scream in outrage, but he felt as though all life had been drained from him. He slumped against the car. Jeremy would have gotten in his car and driven away, outwardly calm, but inside a

seething volcano of fear and despair. But Matt didn't have Jeremy's self control. Instead, he stood there, his arms hanging limply by his sides as tears wended their way down his cheeks. He was thirty-two years old, but he had always sought Jeremy's help before he made any decision in life. Now Jeremy was gone. "Jeremy was always so scared," Matt said, more to himself than Chief Williams. "He didn't know why they were coming for him. That's why he grabbed the gun."

"Well, I never knew him to be very emotional. Didn't look like the kind of guy who'd get scared very easily."

Matt choked down a sob. "He hid it well. It's a developed family talent."

"Ah, well, you can never tell about people. I kinda liked him. Nice quiet citizen, called me only when one of the gangs in town tried to shake him down for protection money."

"He probably thought they were the ones coming through the door," Matt said, anger suddenly rising in his voice. "Why did the government go after him like that? He was an honest man."

"Maybe, but it's good we have those gun registration records. Otherwise some troopers could get killed when they do these things."

Matt looked across the highway and pointed at the smoldering pile of ash. "So they just stood out here and fired into his place until they were sure he was dead. They killed my brother and burned him into ashes and destroyed his property when all they had to do was call him and tell him what they wanted."

The Chief shook his head. "You're not much up on what's happening in this country, are you? Haven't you heard of the SSS, UNAPF, the Stansfield Amendment, any of that?"

"I'm too busy trying to scratch out a living for my family. I don't have time for politics."

The Chief nodded. "Yeah, most people are like that. Anyway, if we find any remains, the coroner will release them in a couple of days, although I doubt there's anything left. Uh, maybe it's a bad time, but since you mentioned the property, I hope you don't expect to take it over now that he's gone."

Matt angrily turned and pointed toward the smoking ruins. "What property? They destroyed it."

"Well, I mean the land. It's not his anymore."

Matt turned toward him, his steel-blue eyes riveted on those of the police chief. "My brother worked two jobs for two years to save the money for that shop, and he worked weekends for two years loading boxcars until the shop started to pay off. The property means nothing to me without him, but what the hell do you mean, it's not his anymore?"

Bo Williams shrugged his shoulders. "It's now the property of the township of Widsbury and the SSS. We confiscated it this morning. We'll auction it and put our share of the money in the police budget."

Matt's mind swam with emotions. He longed to see Jeremy, he feared the future without him, he was angry that Jeremy had been killed, he was bewildered by what Bo

Williams had just told him, that the government had taken Jeremy's property. "How could you confiscate it? His property was all he had in life."

"They had a warrant. That means I can confiscate anything suspected of being used in any way in the alleged crime. Of course, I have to split it with the SSS when they're involved, or any other government office that gets involved to augment their budget."

Matt shook his head. He still couldn't comprehend what Chief Williams was telling him. "He was an honest man. He wasn't guilty of anything."

"Doesn't make any difference. Out of respect for him, I waited until the SSS issued a warrant. I didn't have to do that."

"They issued a warrant!" Matt almost spit out the words. "My brother would never do anything illegal. What was the charge?"

"Conspiracy."

"Conspiracy to do what?"

The chief rolled his eyes. This guy was really naïve. He didn't even suspect that he was subject to arrest. Bo Williams would have arrested him, but he had nothing to gain for Widsbury or himself but a lot of troublesome paperwork. Let the SSS find him. "The usual charge. It's a broad one. Conspiracy against the government."

"Who brought the charge?"

"Any government agency can bring the charge and share in the forfeiture. In this case, I did."

The American people must learn before it is too late that a government powerful enough to give its citizens everything they need, or at least everything the government

says they need, is a government powerful enough to take everything of value away.

Everything. (Journal of Arthur Parker)

Tears clouded Matt's eyes as he headed toward Vickersburg. "Jeremy!" he screamed. "My God, you can't be gone." He drove erratically and twice almost forced drivers off the road. He ruefully noted that Jeremy would have criticized him for driving so recklessly. Jeremy drove precisely at the speed limit and observed all traffic rules. Matt was less meticulous, worrying only about getting to where he was going.

His cell phone rang. He ignored it, but it kept ringing incessantly. Angrily he picked it up. "What the hell do you want?" he screamed.

"Matt, it's Walter Keyes."

Matt began to sob. "Walt, they killed Jeremy. Did you hear me, Jeremy's dead."

Walter paused, then softly said, "I know. I'm so sorry."

"You know? How do you know?" Another driver had to swerve to avoid Matt.

"I have my sources. I heard this morning and tried to call him, but it was too late."

"I can't believe he's gone." Matt began to sob again. "Walt, I miss him already."

"I know. Matt, where are you now?"

"The highway, about ten miles from home." He wasn't sure. He didn't even look at the stores and landmarks he passed as he drove.

"Look, there's a problem here. Don't go back to Vickersburg whatever you do. Meet me at—"

Matt interrupted angrily. "Why shouldn't I go back? I'm confused, I'm scared, I'm sick."

"Yeah, look, I'm sorry to be so blunt, but we've got to act fast. Stop where you are now. I'll meet you and figure out what to do next."

Matt shook his head. "I'll meet you at the shop."

Walt paused, then softly said. "Matt, don't go to the shop. There is no more shop. Now let's just—"

"What do you mean, no more shop? You're talking crazy. I'll see you at the house."

"Matt, I'm not sure you even have a house. They got Jeremy, now they're after you. We've got to—"

"My God, my family!" Matt screamed. He threw the phone aside and headed home.

Many people claim there is a left-wing media conspiracy, but I believe that charge is untrue, that the issue is more complex. There is no leader, no meetings, no specific agreement to bias their stories. Instead, there is a conspiracy of philosophy in that over ninety percent of those in the media and virtually all the `sixties hippies now holding the top editorial positions approach their jobs with a leftist bias. I doubt they even know they instinctively report with a leftist bias. When called on it, they either go into denial or insist that any bias is done to achieve a so-called "social justice," that even if it's wrong, it's done with good intentions. That conspiracy robs Americans of the free press they think the Constitution guarantees them. The Constitution, however, guarantees only that the press shall be free of government control; it does not guarantee that the press will be free, fair, and unbiased. We have never had a truly free press in America; publishers, editors, and journalists have always imposed their agendas on the reading public. That's why we must read and listen to the other side, to balance out the leftist bias of the mainstream media. (Journal of Arthur Parker)

The noontime news followed SSS guidelines for the story. "Today, a Widsbury resident threatened U. S. Special Security Service troopers and UN Anti-gun Peace Force soldiers with an assault rifle when they arrived at his antique store to question him about criminal activities. The resident fired a number of shots, then set his store on fire and committed suicide before negotiators could convince him to surrender. The suspect, Jeremy Daniels, had lived in the area for seven years. In other news . . ."

The answer is, our freedoms disappear when the evil ones have established complete control over the people. At the bottom of America's slippery slope, hidden in the darkness by our ignorance and their deception, an absolute tyranny awaits us. (Journal of Arthur Parker)