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Chapter Thirteen  
**THE WHITE JUDGE**

The grinding pace continued at the farm including days without any sleep, eventually resulting in physical and intellectual numbness that robbed people of the ability to think clearly. We always doubted ourselves, questioning every motive until we saw ourselves as having little worth and downright lucky to be part of this group. One always felt they were being watched, not for signs of success but for failure or non-compliance. Everyone was suspicious of everyone else. No one was really worthy of trust except Larry and people “spilled their guts” to him beyond things normally told a pastor. Frustration, fear and depression had to be masked with a smile or you got the “What’s wrong” examination.

“What’s wrong?” Larry would ask. “Nothing’s wrong,” was the general reply.

“C’mon now. I know when something’s wrong. What’s wrong?” Knowing that personal problems meant you were self absorbed and realizing you had to say something, you made up acceptable responses. Things like how unworthy you felt or how discouraged you were over the slowness of your own progress or how angry you were with yourself over your failure to do something properly. Self-deprecation was the key to getting along and “I’m sorry” became the magic words.

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After a while, however, “I’m sorry” just didn’t cut it and you were viewed suspiciously by the rest of the group. All things thus became polarized to Larry. Like Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, his favor meant the difference between a good day and a bad one. Playing on our every spiritual nerve, he became an expert at fear management. Not a fear of him, personally, because he’d always been a bully and a punk, the kind of people we used to chew up and spit out just for laughs. Rather it was a fear of displeasing God by the acceptable or unacceptable manner in which we treated his prophet. Our love and reverence for God made Larry big in our eyes but his power was no more based in reality than the appearing of the Djian when Aladdin rubbed his lamp.

Getting but a few hours sleep each night for years, coupled with grueling labor and requisite fasting, resulted in escalating impairments. We were stretched beyond our limits, those who lived at the farm much more than me. Recording his own journey in great detail, one of our number would later write,

“A group of men is awoken sharply at four in the morning. Each one thinks to himself, ‘I wish I could sleep just a little longer. It is winter and each man hurries to pull on his stiff and frozen boots. In summer, the smell of manure from the animals housed below permeates the loft where they sleep but the cold weather keeps the aroma at bay. A war veteran leads forty-five minutes of grueling exercises, including 200 pushups and 150 sit-ups. A quick, two-mile run ensues with each man carrying a club or staff.

They file into the warm house where their leader sits; he will lead everyone in prayer and their daily devotion to God. Many begin to nod off as soon as they are seated but a jab in the ribs and the fear of being caught sleeping when they should be worshipping God keeps everyone on edge. The women serve the men breakfast and their leader sits as a commoner among them at the table which is soon enveloped in raucous laughter. The shared hardships of their life bind the men in a camaraderie they all cherish.

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Breakfast ends and the men file out of the warm house. All spend the next half-hour tending to the numerous animals. It is now 6:45 a.m. Some will stay at the farm all day tending animals, repairing buildings and working in the fields. Most will leave to hitchhike to jobs in the city or suburbs. The selected few who own broken-down vehicles struggle mightily to stay awake as they drive, each man struggling with his friend and enemy, sleep.

It is five o'clock in the afternoon and the men begin their trek back to the farm. The vagaries of their modes of transport mean some will arrive back as late as 6:30 in the evening. As soon as they reach home they begin their work tending to the animals. Dinner follows for most but some are fasting; they believe fasting will help bring them closer to God. After dinner, the lieutenants have lists – lists of arduous work to be performed and lists of punishments to be handed out for the previous day's infractions. For most, their fate is assigned to a work crew but others aren't so lucky. One will be forced to run 10 miles for the crime of not washing the goats properly before milking, another, five miles for failing to wake up on time.

After dinner it's out to the fields for more work. Each one secretly hopes it will be only work this evening – drudgery that may last until twelve, one or two-o'clock in the morning. But tonight a meeting for worship and political instruction is called. Though they revere their leader as a great prophet, inwardly, they fear him. No one will admit it but the hard labor is preferable to sitting in a meeting where they listen to lessons on their Holy Book from their leader, lessons and harangues that can last up to four or five hours. Individuals are singled out for criticism in front of the group. Everyone struggles to stay awake. Finally, the meeting ends at 1:00 a.m. The watch list is posted: eight unlucky men have drawn guard duty. The little sleep they have remaining will be interrupted by a 20-minute guard duty between now and 4:00 a.m. Some wash before retiring, others fall filthy and exhausted into their makeshift beds.

A group of men is awoken sharply at four in the morning. Each one thinks, 'I wish I could sleep just a little longer.....'<sup>i</sup>

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But the real pain was within. Most of us began to live with the sense that, no matter how hard we tried or how much we sacrificed, we kept coming up short in our relationship with God and our Pastor. Continually disappointing the God who did so much for us, we couldn't do anything right. We just couldn't win. During one, Sunday service I told Larry I believed God spoke to me about the direction of the church. Revealing himself as the Rosetta Stone of his own spiritual delusion he said, "I don't think that's God. He would've told me first."

That was the moment I should have stood to my feet, turned to my family and said, "Let's go." That's when I knew he had crossed a line. It probably wasn't God speaking to me but that wasn't the point. Declaring that God *wouldn't* speak to me without first checking in with Larry strained any sense of reason. I was in shock but he wasn't finished. Sitting in a rocker made of handcrafted grapevines and covered with a hand-made quilt, he stopped rocking, leaned forward in his chair and quickly reached out to grab a fistful of my beard. Pulling me within inches of his face he asked, "Why do you always gravitate toward my enemies?" I felt myself looking in the eyes of the Minotaur. I should have said, "Here's five bucks. Bump up your medication," but the only bubble percolating from the swamp of my puny, alligator brain said, "Huh?" Believing a few of us were intent on taking over his church, he was making it known there was but one source for revelation in this group.

The comment of Rene Descartes begins to describe what I felt. "So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top." I was dumbfounded. With him from the beginning, he now publicly labeled me as untrustworthy. If I'm gravitating toward his enemies, no one else is going to associate with me. They didn't want such criticism attached to them. Anything other than absolute obedience was viewed as total betrayal and no one escaped scrutiny as a potential Judas. Larry needed enemies. It caused all of us to lovingly rally around him. It wasn't *him* against his enemies; it was *us* against his enemies. This wasn't fun anymore. We'd placed our collective feet on the slippery slope that leads nowhere but down.

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Eventually, something had to happen with such a group of disobedient and rebellious people. Physical punishment in the form of a buggy whip began to make its appearance. Except it wasn't called punishment. It was called discipline. One *disciplines* someone they love. This is not hearsay. I stood against the wall in the barn and received ten lashes because I made a mistake. Ten lashes across a backside reconstructed with grafted skin. Ten lashes from "the White Judge," a six-foot buggy whip fashioned from strips of pure, white leather bound about a flexible plastic rod. To be certain we might've left at any time, we weren't physical prisoners. We were however, psychological and emotional prisoners. The conditioned belief that physical survival for our families and ourselves depended on our remaining here provided the shackles. We were behaviorally frozen: locked into a static pattern of response. This was such a destructive mix. With a profound desire to genuinely please God, the belief was nurtured that this was the only place one could really serve and be "sold out" to Him. If we wanted to leave and join a church on God's purge list that was our business. Our critics were correct: we were a brainwashed cult. We were born again Christians at the same time.

In April of 1978 the storm arose that led, ultimately, to the breakup of the Church of the Risen Christ and the All Saved Freak Band. The flashpoint was our children; the one place church leadership should not have gone. I've read that, when writing, one should avoid superlatives but these innocents were raised under Draconian circumstances. They were allowed to play but were never allowed to be children. They were taught not to cry out when whipped. My ego wants to use, and hide behind, the word "spanked" but whipping is the true word. Historical accounts of entire, Indian tribes slipping unnoticed through Cavalry lines were used to illustrate how important it would be to keep children quiet in war. Using belts or paddles, parent's preference, children were robbed of the ability to make mistakes. Living in our own apartment, Sandy home schooled our babies: a blessing in disguise.

It seems God had spoken to Larry that one of the female children in the church was to be removed from her parents and placed in Dianne's hands. Citing biblical examples it was designed to be personal training for an exceptional child. On an evening in February, one of two women in the house heard the sounds of whipping coming from an upstairs

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bedroom. Walking by and looking through the partially opened door she saw the 11-year old child crouched on the floor as Dianne played the horsewhip “up and down as hard as she could and the clothes were ripping off of the kid – and there was blood.”<sup>iii</sup>

As her heart attempted to pound its way out of her chest, Carole returned downstairs to tell Millie about what was going on. Not knowing what to do, the two horrified women sickened when Dianne beat the fleeing child from the upstairs bedroom, down the hallway, through the dining room and into the kitchen. Larry, now disturbed by the commotion, came in angry. Crushing any brief hope the women entertained for the child he bristled, “You’re not doing it right. You’re not breaking her spirit.” He was now going to teach his prophetess the right way to whip a child. For another 10 to 15 minutes the “White Judge” taunted on, whistling through the air until the object of its lesson wilted, hanging like a rag; until the only sound her heaving body could make was that of gasping for breath.<sup>iii</sup> With every muscle locked in terror and unaware they had just been changed forever, the two women struggled to hide their fear-strangled breathing and disappear into the horror soaked walls. Unable to stop up their ears from the sound that would haunt their years, angry crutches pounding through the room caused them to feel like prey caught in the web of the spider. “Oh God, please don’t let me be next. PLEASE JESUS!” The question that troubles them still is, “Why didn’t Jesus keep us safe from all of that?”

The issue was kept quiet even from church members. All I knew was that several people in the group decided to leave at the same time. Sandy and I were unaware of events until heavily armed SWAT Team members, in flak jackets, surrounded our home. Removing our children at gunpoint, their justification for such extremes lay in their information. They were told we were all heavily armed and dangerous. All the children of the church were removed to Children's Services and stripped to be examined for signs of possible abuse. Our children were released within 24 hours but a child of another family had marks on her body. Described as “several narrow scars on her upper back, at the waist and behind her legs,” there's no way of knowing how they got there, save the fact their daughter was the one reported beaten. Her father refused to cooperate with authorities and was held in contempt of court. The charges, as stated in the August 30, 1978, edition of the Ashtabula Star

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Beacon read, the children "were forced to live in an atmosphere of fear and violence and exposed to abuse of siblings and friends who are whipped and beaten to extremes by other than the parents."

In the end, Dianne was convicted of child abuse. Sentenced to six-months in jail and a fine of \$500, Judge Avellone suspended all of it save six days in County lockup. In his comments he said he believed Miss Sullivan "had cause to discipline the child but lost control."

Sandy and I stayed until the matter was settled. Larry was in hiding across the border in Pennsylvania, Dianne was resting weekends in the Ashtabula County Jail and everyone involved perjured themselves in an effort to save Larry. On the stand I was asked if I had ever seen anyone whipped. With ten lashes still fresh in my mind and the knowledge that other adults were beaten as well, I said "no." No one asked me to lie under oath but I did. I promised truthfulness before God, placing my hand on His holy book and I lied. Always branded as disloyal, I became disloyal to God that I might be loyal to my fugitive pastor. When I had to lie before God to remain in good favor with Larry, it was over. No authority figure in the church confronted me for lying under oath. That's what did it. No one said anything. I finally saw it for what it was, and I was ill. Sunlight is such a great disinfectant. The insanity, now exposed to all, lay disemboweled and festering. Gasping for breath, it begged to have the curtains drawn once again but I couldn't do it. I could no longer justify the dream of decades. Neither could I yet walk away. That problem would be solved shortly.

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<sup>i</sup> Ron Taggart, President of Cult Information Services of Northeast Ohio from the article, *Understanding Terror*

<sup>ii</sup> John Griffith, *The Willoughby News Herald*, October 3, 1978

<sup>iii</sup> John Griffith, *The Willoughby News Herald*, October 3, 1978