

SARAH STORY III

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Laus Deo

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God's Plan

Arnie began reading through Antoine's arrest record that she had accumulated during her time with the Port Orange Police Department. There was nothing stellar but then again she was a patrol officer and not an investigator or detective. Her arrests consisted of DUI's, drug possessions, stolen cars, and the nightly domestic disputes. He didn't really expect to see anything resembling what could be called a major bust on her record. One anomaly in her records was when she responded to a burglary call to an address that he knew all too well. The address that Antoine responded to was his late partner Jack Michael's house and there was no further report on it. The only thing he could figure was some kind of false alarm on that fancy alarm system of theirs. Arnie had seen the intricate alarm system himself so it was possible that it was a false alarm and nothing further was required from Antoine when she responded.

Arnie had come to a dead end regarding the reason why Richie and Bobby picked Antoine up in the first place. No charges were filed according to the Booking Department log and he was unable to access either Richie's or Bobby's records. All he found was a record of her being locked up and the sloppily entered record of the arrest which listed Richie as the arresting officer, but again no charges were recorded. And Arnie realized that happened at times when you have a really busy night and you just throw suspects into some cells with the intentions of coming back later, or even the next morning, to do all of the paperwork.

The most puzzling part of everything in the box of Antoine's personal effects was the paperback Bible that Arnie had set aside. From what Arnie knew of Antoine she was a straight-up

officer, she wasn't a floozy or anything like that. But he never figured her to be a church person. The visitor's log for that evening showed just one name for the twenty or thirty suspects that were booked that day and evening. The female visitor's name was Evelyn Craig and hers was the only name on the log for that evening and he found that odd with there being no other names on the list. Not the nurse that had visited the incarcerated women. Not the county psychologist who was actually writing a book, a novel at that, and using the inmates as characters. Not the county jail chaplain who spent more time riding around in the fancy vehicle the county supplied rather than he did looking out for the inmate's spiritual welfare. There wasn't even an entry for the jailer on duty which was over the male and the female detainment areas.

"No wonder she was able to escape," he mumbled but then he caught himself to keep the others in the office from thinking that he had taken up talking to himself. As he glanced around to see if anyone had seen him talking to himself he noticed that he was all alone in the common work area where all of their desks were situated. He did notice a custodial crew in Tommy's office that was cleaning the carpet but that was all.

The digital clock on the fancy phone system let him know it was nearly eight o'clock and he realized that he was alone for the most part. The department didn't have a second or third shift when it came to inspectors and detectives so the offices were generally left unattended. Port Orange used just uniformed patrol officers from roughly six in the evening to six in the morning. Anytime a detective or CSI tech was needed Dispatch would be responsible for contacting someone to respond. Port Orange wasn't as large as Orlando or Miami so some concessions had to be made.

Something about Antoine's visitor, this Evelyn Craig, piqued Arnie's curiosity. He took his mouse and clicked on the "*Media Archives*" icon on the departmental intranet where they store all of the footage of the various video cameras for the entire complex. His thoughts were that there should have been video coverage of any visitors to Antoine's cell. Arnie didn't really have much confidence in that happening considering that Antoine supposedly just walked out of her cell and out of the building un-noticed by anyone. Being un-noticed wasn't all that important to Arnie as he realized that Antoine was an employee here after all. The likelihood that everyone in the complex knew that she had been arrested was slim to none.

Once inside the Media Archives he clicked on the icon for "Internal Surveillance" and then he made his way to the "*Admittance & Lock-up*" video feeds. This page has rows and columns of dates as text links to the media files contained within. Arnie verified the date of Miss Evelyn Craig's visit and then he located the link to that date in the intranet page. When he clicked on the media file for that date a media player appeared on his screen along with the opening frame of the video with a "*Play*" button superimposed over it. The great part about the player was that you could fast forward through *hours* of video simply by sliding a little bar located at the bottom of the player. Using this handy tool allowed Arnie to quickly find the timeframe just prior to when Evelyn Craig signed the visitor's log. Once he had the right spot he clicked the *Play* button and watched as some thirty seconds of video

past before anyone even came within view of the camera. Before Arnie realized it, there was a woman standing at the counter and it appeared as if she was signing the visitor's log. Once the officer on duty checked her belongings he walked her back to Antoine's cell. One thing Arnie learned right off was that Evelyn Craig was not one of Antoine's relatives because she was black. The jail system both city and county-wide allowed various faith based personnel to have limited access to the inmates. Arnie had never seen this woman before but that didn't mean all that much because these organizations all relied upon volunteers to carry out their missions. The jailer opened the cell door to let Miss Craig inside and it was plain to see that the women didn't know each other with the formal greeting they gave each other. Generally that women are friends either hugged or gave each other "air kisses" on the side of each other's cheeks.

Antoine and Miss Craig sat there on the cell cot for the better part of an hour just chatting from what Arnie could see in the video. When it got close to the one-hour visitation limit it appeared as if Miss Craig was praying for Antoine. At least her eyes were closed and her lips were moving so Arnie assumed she was praying. Antoine did not appear to be praying because her eyes were wide open and she was just sitting there on the cot with a frown on her face.

The jailer soon showed up to escort Miss Craig back to the sign-in counter so she could sign out from her visit with Antoine. Arnie compared the time on the video with the times recorded on the copy of the visitor's log sheet and saw that they were within a minute of each other. The video of Antoine's cell was rather uneventful so Arnie took his mouse and clicked on the "1.5X" link to put the video in fast forward speed. The video went faster than he realized and he had to click on the "pause" button and then "Reverse" so he could go back to where things got interesting.

Antoine had been milling about the cell and after a while she sat down on the cot and picked up the paperback Bible that Evelyn Craig had left behind. That same paperback Bible that was sitting in Arnie's desk. She seemed to be studying the book instead of just reading it straight through as one would normally do. She kept referring to something inside the front cover and then she would thumb her way to a spot in the book. After about thirty minutes of reading Arnie watched as Antoine got down on the concrete floor of the cell. She lay there quite a while face down with her arms spread out away from her sides while her legs remained together. Arnie didn't have a clue as to why Antoine was lying on the floor instead of her cot. When she finally did get up off of the floor she kept wiping something out of her eyes with the tips of her fingers. Arnie realized that she was crying for some unknown reason but she didn't seem unhappy about anything despite the fact that she was incarcerated. Then Arnie watched as she stood there in her cell with her arms and hands held up in the air as if reaching for the sky. On her face was the sweetest smile that Arnie had ever seen on anyone, male or female. He was actually quite touched by the scene playing out on his computer screen.

Suddenly her hands dropped as someone walked up to the cell door with the officer on duty and Arnie watched as someone walked into Antoine's cell and it appeared as she was arguing with

the man. Arnie thought he recognized the man in the cell but it was hard to make out as his back was facing towards the camera. When the man and Antoine went to leave the cell Arnie soon recognized the man when he saw his face because it was none other than Richie. Now the puzzle was really starting to confuse Arnie because Richie first locked Antoine up, now he is seen on video taking her out of her cell, and lastly he calls it an *escape* when nothing of the sort took place.

In spite of all of the issues with Richie and Antoine's purported *escape*, Arnie's attention kept falling back on that book that Evelyn Craig had left behind with Antoine. It soon dawned on Arnie that the book was still there in his top desk drawer. He clicked the *Pause* button on his screen and rummaged around in the messy desk drawer until he found the three inch by five inch book with *New Testament* embossed into the leather-like design on the front cover. Arnie remembered Antoine looking at something inside the front cover of the book so he started there. He opened it and he saw, in a woman's neat handwriting, a list of what appeared to be Bible verses. At the top of this list in the same handwriting was a single sentence that was underlined twice:

"The Romans Road To Salvation"

As Arnie was reading that phrase he felt a hand upon his shoulder causing him to jump up out of his chair in a total panic. He knocked over his chair and then he nearly fell back over it as it hit him square in the shins of both legs.

"Tommy, you sonofabitch, I told you 'bout sneakin' up on me like that..."

But there was no one else in the office with Arnie, not even the custodians that had been cleaning Tommy's office. Now Arnie was really spooked and when he got spooked like that he also got angry.

"Who the hell's hiding out there?"

In spite of his yelling and swearing no one came forward because there simply wasn't anyone else in the office. He looked up at the ceiling because the air conditioning wasn't helping anything the way it was blowing through his thinning hair.

"*Sonofabitch,*" he swore again as he pinched his fingers while picking up the chair that he had knocked over. He slammed the chair down onto the floor as hard as he could as if trying to break it and then he sat down on it. He started swearing again at the air conditioning blowing ever so softly across his face with its two-day old beard irritating him even more.

"*I'm freezing my ass off in here,*" he said out loud and he didn't much care who heard him either. He scribbled a note to himself on a little yellow stickie and stuck it on his computer monitor as a reminder to get maintenance to change the air conditioning temperature.

Arnie went into the break room to see if there was any hot coffee in there and sure enough there was enough in the one pot for a cup. He needed something to warm himself up because he could still feel the air conditioning on his face there in the break room. He poured the oily black liquid into a Styrofoam cup and tasted it and it tasted awful but it was coffee and it was hot and that's all he

cared about. Arnie walked over to the table where he had tossed the paperback New Testament and sat down into one of those cheap plastic chairs that break rooms are so famous for.

Arnie sat at the round table with magazines strewn in the middle of it and drank about half of the cup of coffee that could take the paint off of cars. Setting the cup on the table he reached for the New Testament and felt the cool air on his face once more as he opened the book to the front inside cover. He made up his mind to just ignore the air conditioning as it swirled around his face because he wasn't going to let a little cool air ruin his investigation.

Something in this innocent looking paperback affected Antoine in a profound way and he intended to find out exactly what it was. The title of the list that started with "*Romans Road*" apparently was a description of the verse listed below it for all of the verse in the list started with the word "*Romans*". When he turned to the first of the verses on the list, Romans 3:23, he noticed the air conditioning had kicked off because it was no longer blowing on his face. He began reading the verses in anticipation of learning what it was that Antoine had experienced.

Arnie read the first part of Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*"

Without sounding judgmental about anyone including himself, Arnie had pretty much already figured it out for himself that mankind was basically no damn good.

As he read this verse a creature from within the pits of Hell itself roared out in a rage, "*It's a lie! The Book is a lie!*" The beast had indwelt Arnie for many years now which had actually turned into nearly four decades. The beast's name was none other than Carnivean, a known prince of Powers. His influence on those humans who he indwelt, and he indwelt many, was to tempt mankind to obscenity and shamelessness.

In the middle of Romans 6:23 there was an admonition, "*The wages of sin is death...*"

He had heard this same saying from his grandmother when he had misbehaved as a young boy.

"*There is no death! Sin is fun. Sin is good!*" roared Carnivean as it started making its way back to Arnie's soul. Carnivean had indwelt Arnie so long that a visit to his soul was rarely needed because Arnie had traveled so far away from his Christian upbringing.

The ending of Romans 6:23 struck a chord within Arnie's being, "*But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

This too brought memories flooding back into Arnie's mind for he had a rough childhood after his parents died when a category four hurricane named Donna hit Florida a second time. Donna had crossed right through Arnie's hometown of Naples, Florida, killing many in her path as she attacked the Sunshine State. And so Arnie was raised by his devout grandparents when they took him and he sister in as their own children.

"*There was no Jesus as the Son of God!*" bellowed Carnivean as it began its ascent to where Arnie was sitting in the chair.

Arnie learned about God's love in Romans 5:8 where it was highlighted in the paperback Bible, *"God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us!"*.

This was the verse that tripped up so many people, including Arnie, when it came to their own salvation. Mankind erroneously thinks that God will not accept them until they *cleanup* their lives but this verse says that no one is good enough for God to forgive unless they first ask Jesus the Christ to be their Savior.

"Blasphemy! Jesus did not die that day! Jesus was allowed to live because his followers paid bribes to the Roman soldiers!" Carnivean's now shrill voice was nearly screeching as Arnie was contemplating the truths of God's Word and the Romans Road.

Arnie read Romans 10:13 where the highlighted text in the paperback stated that *"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved!"*

"If it were only that easy," Arnie thought out loud.

"It isn't! You can't be saved, God predestined for you to be with me in Hell. I'm coming to help you understand that God never loved you or He wouldn't have taken your parents away from you." The anxiety in Carnivean's voice was becoming more advanced as Arnie traveled through the verses from Evelyn Craig's highlighted New Testament.

Arnie believed that Jesus had lived, and died, but his doubts revolved around the wicked life he had been living all of his life. But then in Romans 10:9 and 10 Arnie read *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."*

"Don't say that Name! I will kill you if you say that Name!" Carnivean had gone from being Arnie's friend and protector to being his attacker.

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Carnivean was stopped dead in the middle of the path it had been travelling back to Arnie's soul by a force much stronger and sinister. The force was so powerful that it knocked Carnivean completely off the path and out into the murky waters running alongside the path. When Carnivean came up out of the water there was death in its eyes for the one responsible for this attack. But the look of rage on Carnivean's face soon turned to terror as it beheld the imp standing in the middle of the pathway with sword drawn and held high over its head with two powerful hands grasping it. When the imp sensed there would be no danger from Carnivean it stuck the point of the double-edged sword into the soft surface of the path to demonstrate that it had no aggressive intentions. Walking towards Carnivean the imp pulled a round disc out of the bag hanging from its muscular arms and held it out towards Carnivean. The disc was made of coal and yet the markings of the Fire Tribunal carved within the center of a pentagram were unmistakable.

Carnivean almost dropped the disc due to the terror coursing through its still soaking wet body. Carnivean had been summoned to a Fire Tribunal by the Great Beelzebub!

The first instinct that crossed Carnivean's wicked mind was to flee the imp standing on the pathway. Size wise Carnivean was much larger than the imp but then there was the matter of the sword sticking in the middle of the pathway. These imps used to deliver summons and other "requests" were well known for their fighting abilities despite their small size and they were well known for throwing the barbed swords they carry with great precision. Without further contemplation Carnivean said three words to the imp and then stepped in behind it on the pathway.

"I will follow."

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"Could it be?" he said aloud without caring whether or not anyone heard him talking to himself.

"God, You can't mean this. Even You probably don't know all of the bad things that I've done. Do You know of all the alcohol and spirits that I've consumed in my lifetime? The three marriages that I simply threw away because of my unloving spirit? And the children, Lord the children that I've fathered through my life that don't even know who I am. God, could You ever love someone as unlovable as the wretch sitting here before You?"

The cool air was back, the air conditioner must have kicked back on. Arnie looked up at the ceiling and noticed that the air conditioning opening was clear across the room from where he was sitting. Nevertheless he felt it, a soft, gentle breeze flowing around his face and up into his hair. Arnie sat there trying to figure out the deal with the cool air when he felt yet another sensation, this one being a bit more personal in nature.

There was a hand on each of his shoulders, well not really a hand but the presence of a hand because Arnie looked and there was no one touching him but the sensation was still there. This time when he was touched he didn't react as badly as he did at his desk so he just sat there calmly waiting to see what happened next. He next felt the hands, or whatever they were, begin to push him, or rather guide him out of the plastic and steel chair and onto his knees. As he knelt there on the uncarpeted break room floor he reached up to his left shoulder with his right hand in order to touch the hand that was on his shoulder but there simply wasn't anyone there. And yet the sensation of someone pressing their hands onto his shoulders was still there and quite perceptible.

Arnie soon forgot all about the hands as he began talking aloud and for some odd reason he felt completely at peace doing so. Remembering Antoine as she lay on her cell floor after reading the very same book that he had just read he stretched himself out on the break room floor and began to speak in earnest to God for the first time in his life.

"Father God, I'm here. And You are right, it has been a long time in coming. Now I know why my life has been so very miserable and it's because I've spent it without You and Your Son. I ask You now Lord Jesus if You would come into this wicked heart of mine. And Lord, cleanse me of my sins as you did with Marie Antoine. Like her, I want You to make me a trophy of Your grace. And Father..."

Arnie prayed there the better part of an hour pouring out his sins before a God that already knew all of them. As Arnie brought a sin to mind and confessed it to God he asked for forgiveness and moved on to the next one that he thought of. Arnie even asked God to forgive him for any sins that he committed unknowingly. Arnie fell asleep there on the break room floor exhausted not only by the long day but the exhaustion of pouring his heart out to God.

They found Arnie lying there on the break room floor the next morning and they didn't know if Arnie was dead or what could else could be wrong with him. Others knew of Arnie's reputation and figured him to be simply passed out from a night of drinking. The Bible was still on the table where Arnie had been sitting but it was sitting on top of the pile of magazines so no one connected it to Arnie. Ed Thomas, one of Arnie's *carpetbaggers*, came into the break room with Andy Wilson, his partner, when he heard the gossip about Arnie lying there on the floor. Both of them stood over by the window giggling and laughing at Arnie like a couple of kids.

"Wake him up," said Ed Thomas as if he was in control.

"How Eddie?" asked Andy Wilson.

"Kick him inna leg there. Dats how we roust other drunks when we find 'em passed out like dis bum. Give him a quick kick, Andy." Ed Thomas was always giving Andy orders on what he should and should not do.

Andy kicked Arnie on the shin of his left leg and he began to stir.

"What happened? Man alive, I musta fell asleep. I ain't slept that good since..."

"Drunken bastard," announced Ed Thomas.

"Hey Arnie, don't cha mean ya passed out? Ya drunken sod," Andy Wilson was helping Ed heap some scorn onto Arnie's already tarnished reputation.

"What? No, I ain't had nothin' to drink guys," Arnie said as he stood up on his feet.

"Hell yes ya did. Ya done slept it off and ya got them bloodshot eyes to prove it," said Ed Thomas, who was once again assuming a leadership position that he simply did not possess in the department.

"Well, I ain't drunk, fellers. But I am kinda hungry, I'll see you guys later, I gotta go see Tommy."

Arnie walked out of the only door to the break room leaving Ed and Andy standing there looking at each other with a "*what'd I do?*" look on their faces.

Andy had to throw one more remark at Arnie's back, "Yeah, bet old Tommy wants to see his drunk ass as well. Whadda think, Eddie?"

"You know I been that drunk before Andy where I passed out, but never while I was workin'. You know me, I don't drink while I'm duty."

"Me neither, Eddie. Me neither," said Andy as he parroted Ed's views on Arnie.

Arnie knocked on Tommy Addison's door and went on in closing the door behind him.

“Morning Tommy,” Arnie said as he sat down uninvited in a chair sliding it up close to Tommy’s uncluttered desk.

“You are mighty chipper for someone who slept on our break room floor. Good grief Arnie, I thought you were gonna stop...”

Tommy stopped talking in mid-sentence and stared at Arnie’s bloodshot eyes and his beaming face. This wasn’t the face of a man suffering from a hangover and Arnie never said a word but his face said it all. Tommy had seen this face on many a person both male and female, different nationalities, different ages and one thing remained the same. The joyous look on their faces.

“Arnie, you didn’t.” It was as much a statement as it was a question.

The effervescent smile on Arnie’s face was all the evidence that Tommy needed before he flat out asked him the question on his mind.

“Why Arnold Smith, did you go and get yourself saved by our Lord Jesus Christ last night? Did you man? Tell me truthful now!”

“I did Tommy, and I wanted to tell you before I went and told anybody else. As if they are gonna believe me anyways. I read that New Testament I found in Antoine’s personal effects last night and I asked our Lord Jesus to come into my heart and now I’m a new man, Tommy. All that stuff from the past is behind me now and a glorious future is before me.”

Arnie noticed a tear rolling down Tommy’s cheek and his jaws were clenched tight.

“Tommy, what’s the matter? I thought my news would make ya happy.”

“Man *I am happy* for you, Arnie and I’m also happy for myself as well cause you ain’t the only one that got blessed here. I’m happy for myself as well as for you.” Tommy wiped his eyes with a tissue he had pulled from a box on the side of his desk.

“What do you mean, Tommy?” Arnie asked.

“Lawd man, I been a prayin’g over you for near five years now, Arnie. Yeah baby, you got saved and I gotta blessin’ for prayin’ over you.”

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“Wait here Carnivean,” said the muscular imp authoritatively.

Carnivean stood behind the imp who was standing before the gates leading to the cavern where the Fire Tribunals are held. Being here as an honored guest was one of Carnivean’s past accomplishments but now to be entering through the gates that only the accused and the guards enter through was un-nerving. Usually Carnivean was cool and aloof but now the ice water in its veins was running hot from the terror coursing through its body as fate awaited on the other side of the gates. Carnivean couldn’t believe that a demon of stature was being held by this muscle bound imp instead of being taken directly to the newly installed Imp of Hatred that had replaced the one killed. Carnivean was sure explanations could be offered up to the Imp of Hatred, along with the customary bribe, to allow the accused to speak directly with the head of the Fire Tribunal.

Without warning the gates to the center of the Fire Tribunal area opened wide and Carnivean witnessed one the most terrifying sites in the underworld – the Fire Tribunal Gauntlet. The Gauntlet was comprised of the great horde of instructors from the Realm of Death that specialized in murder and murder alone. Carnivean nearly passed out from fear as the new Imp of Hatred came to the end of the two lines of the most fearsome group of murderous beasts that Carnivean had ever witnessed. The Imp of Hatred was part bull, part dragon and, true to its name, full of hatred which was directed right at Carnivean. The Imp of Hatred stepped into the end of The Gauntlet, murdering the last beast in each line by beheading them before anyone realized what was happening. The Imp of Hatred held up both of the heads it had severed from the bodies of the former occupants of lines of The Gauntlet. None of the other members of the lines knew what had taken place for their hatred was being directed towards Carnivean standing at the gates.

The Imp of Hatred turned and raised the still bleeding heads high and then flung them into the gallery of spectators off to one side. The crowd roared its approval of the murder and carnage displayed and The Gauntlet hadn't even started yet. The Imp of Hatred turned back to face the accused standing at the start of The Gauntlet and ordered the accused to start running through the mass murders assembled on each side of the blood soaked field.

“Step forth!” bellowed the Imp of Hatred and the summons bearer poked Carnivean in the back hard enough to draw blood.

“Move, now!” it ordered Carnivean poking the barbed sword even deeper now. The spectators were going wild at this point screaming for Carnivean's death.

But his blood was the least of Carnivean's worries and even The Gauntlet was no match for the horror that just entered the center of the Ring of Fire for Carnivean saw the Great Beelzebub move into the center of the Ring of Fire, its huge claw-like hand held up a rolled-up document. Carnivean knew all too well that the document was the accusations of losing the human named Arnold Smith that Carnivean had indwelt for over forty human years.

Carnivean once more felt the pain of the barbed sword in its back and without a word took off running towards the opening of The Gauntlet. The crowd again went wild with excitement as the Fire Tribunal began.

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Floyd Larck lives in Orlando Florida with his wife Debbie, their lovebird named Peaches and a cockatiel named P.J. Floyd is an amateur radio operator and has been writing for five years as of the writing of this book you have just read.

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