

**Bespoke**  
***Based On A True Story***

I sat on the edge of the bed with my hands folded, breathing deeply and trying desperately to get back to the real world. I exhaled loudly and started rocking slowly, eyes burning, throat catching. Tucking my hands under my thighs I closed my eyes, inadvertently letting the nightmare come flooding back unbidden.

I could feel a strange combination of physical misery from the humid Brazilian weather and eager anticipation as I watched my wife Tressa bounce the newest addition to our family in her arms.

Seven-month-old Naomi's contagious smile spread easily to all of our faces as we boarded the Cessna, elated at our victory in obtaining a visa for our newly adopted baby girl. As we soared high over the Amazon, even our pilot Tripp was smiling contentedly, caught up in the excitement.

Then an explosive spatter of bullets ripped through the plane and tore my world apart. My Tess had Naomi cradled in her lap, and their lives were instantly and cruelly cut short with the same shot. Our pilot was hit too, and the little plane pitched into a dive. Barely holding on, Tripp managed to bring us down in the river, landing with a cacophonous splash that shook the vessel. The aircraft flipped on impact, and the wings caught in the branches as we fell, twisting the Cessna into a spiral. I was yanked by my seatbelt, but I managed to remain conscious as the plane settled in place. The next hour or two were horrific, and I had to remain void of emotion simply to function properly. I managed to haul Tripp from the plane and fit a tourniquet on his leg, then strap seven-year-old Caleb to his back to float down the river. In fear and grief I grabbed the bodies of my wife and daughter and moved our entire group along the river until we encountered a group of Peruvian villagers in dugouts. Numbly I helped Tripp and Caleb clamber into the boats, then moved to the lifeless bodies I had kept from floating away. As I reached around my wife to pick her up, I finally broke. Weeping, I clung to her, desperate and lost in my anguish.

The almost physical pain of the tragedy woke me from my nightmare, and I was back in my bedroom. I didn't remember getting off the bed, but now I was curled up on the floor, weeping. After a few minutes I climbed onto my knees and leaned forward against the bed.

"I don't understand. Why? What's Your purpose in this?" I pleaded, my face wet and my head throbbing.

"She had so much ahead of her. She wasn't done. She wasn't done!" I sobbed, pressing my face into the sheets. I wasn't sure which of my beloved girls I meant, and I didn't care. My wife had so much left to offer to the people we worked with in the mission field and to our own family, and our sweet Naomi's life had only begun. Even though I held on to the hope that I served a God who had everything under His control, it felt as if Caleb and I were alone.

It wasn't the last time I would go to God in agony, looking for an answer. Yet as the Almighty King, He knew I wouldn't understand, not yet. But instead of simply standing separate,

distantly reminding me that I wasn't in control and that I shouldn't pretend to be wiser than He, God acted as the loving Father He is, comforting me with passages, people, and circumstances I still can't explain.

If I could end the story there, it would be simpler, maybe more identifiable for others who have gone through grief. Yet despite the unique trials I had already faced, it wasn't the end. God still had some plot twists left.

A few months after the tragedy the CIA admitted that they had men working with the Peruvian officials who shot down the plane. The Cessna was mistaken for a drug-smuggling plane, and after receiving no response from our pilot, the men authorized a Peruvian military aircraft to open fire. By the time they realized they had been using the wrong frequency and Tripp pleaded for help, it was too late.

My family's horror was now an international incident.

A flood of dignitaries and government officials sent their condolences and requested permission to pay their respects at the funeral. Our little Kingdom Chapel in Steelmain, Minnesota was featured in global media as men whose names and faces I knew from political specials on TV asked to attend the memorial service, and security continued to tighten until I was locked away with Caleb in an undisclosed location. Family and friends would have to jump through hoops simply to be able to attend the funeral, let alone visit Caleb and I personally. The names got bigger, and one morning Pastor Roger Reimers called on me to let me know that the President of the United States had called him that morning, asking him to pass along his condolences to me.

I stood, head pounding and cheeks wet, and moved to the bathroom. I flipped the faucet on and ran my hands under the tap, splashing my face. I sighed as the cool water ran over my eyes and forehead. I couldn't say I was ready to move on, but I had composed myself, and an inexplicable security that went beyond physical protection settled over me.

A pleasant jingle sounded from my bedroom, a noise so out of place in my sorrow that I barked a short laugh. Shaking my head, I walked into my room and swiped the happy little mobile phone off the table beside my bed.

"Nate Orchard," I answered automatically. "Hey Nate, how're you doing?"

I sighed. "Getting there Roger, getting there. It's not something you just 'get over.'"

"I know, I'm sorry. We're all praying for you," Pastor Reimers reminded me sympathetically. "Don't I know it," I replied, and I was telling the truth. It was only by God's grace and the love

He and His people showed me that I was able to even stand on my own two feet. Knowing my own weakness I recognized that only a loving God beyond my control was keeping me steady, and I was grateful beyond words.

“Don’t know if I’m ready for the real world just yet, but I wish Caleb and I could at least get outta the house,” I remarked. Being locked away with my sorrow wasn’t helping alleviate the pain, and although I needed some time alone, how could I pick myself up again from the confines of my bedroom?

“Sorry, can’t do anything about that just yet,” replied Roger apologetically, but then he brightened up.

“Actually, I might be able to help relieve your boredom a little. You’re gonna have a visitor later this afternoon, which might be a nice distraction.”

“Who?” I asked, curiosity piqued.

“Dave Bunton. His wife teaches at Kingdom Christian Schools.”

I knew the face and name, but I hadn’t gotten to know the man as well as I would have liked to. “Why him?” I asked, confused. “I don’t know if I’m ready for anyone outside of family and close friends.”

“Exactly,” Pastor Reimers said mysteriously. “Praying for you, Nate. Talk to you later.” “Thanks, appreciate it. Bye.”

And with that, my conversation with the outside world was cut off for most of the day. I prayed, read, wrote, and wandered, feeling lost to the world. I sat with Caleb whenever I could, and more tears were shed.

The doorbell rang at four and I lifted my head from my hands. A man made his way into the house, dressed in a charcoal suit and a blue tie, but what caught my attention was the massive bag he held over one shoulder. He thanked the security guard who let him in, then crossed the living room to shake my hand.

“Dave Bunton. Sorry for your loss, Mr. Orchard.”

“Thank you,” I replied automatically, looking with curiosity at his parcel. He noticed my gaze and smiled kindly.

“Mr. Orchard, what were you planning on wearing to the funeral?”

I started. The thought hadn’t even crossed my mind. I laughed hoarsely.

“I... hadn’t really thought about it. I’m a jungle missionary, I’ve got T-shirts, cargo shorts, and flip-flops. What more do I need?”

Mr. Bunton raised an eyebrow in a way that seemed more excited than mocking.

“Mr. Orchard, we’re talking about an event attended by political dignitaries from across the world. Not only should you look your best for them-” he paused, took a deep breath, “-you

should look your best for her.”

I snorted. “Tess would not have been happy if I showed up in a sweaty sleeveless, true.” Mr. Bunton smiled sympathetically.

“No, probably not. That’s where I come in. I’ve got some stuff from the Rogers department store that I’d like you to try on. Let’s see what we can do.”

The next hour or so was spent trying on six different suits, two shirts to go with each suit, and two ties for each shirt. By the end of it I had tried more combinations than I would have thought possible to fit in the bag he carried. I shook my head, looking at all six suits, twelve shirts, and twenty-four ties laid out on my living room floor.

“So,” said Mr. Bunton, hands on his hips. “What did you like best? I’ll get it tailored and sent back by tonight.”

I was taken by surprise. From what I could tell, this was his job, and honestly I had been hoping to go through the motions and let him tell me what worked.

“I’m no expert,” I said finally. “Which one should I take?”

He looked at me for a moment, pondering something much deeper than which tie to pair with which shirt. Finally he sighed and dropped his hands, then reached up and stroked his chin.

“Mr. Orchard, it is a rare occasion that God speaks very clearly and undeniably to me. Today, as I drove to work, He said something so powerfully that it was almost audible. He asked me to get you a suit.

I know it might seem small, but... I’ve been given a part to play in your story, and I’m not going to waste that honor. I’ll tailor them, but everything you see here is coming back. They’re all yours.”

And with that, he scooped up an empty bag and reached out to shake my hand.

I was flabbergasted. I opened and closed my mouth a few times, speechless. Finally I reached out and grabbed his outstretched arm with both of my hands.

“Thank you Dave. Thank you. You don’t know how much this means to me.” He laughed as I shook his hand.

“Mr. Orchard, let me tell you something. I’m a tailor. My job is make sure people are dressed to impress, sometimes very important people.”

He then proceeded to list names of his customers, names I was asked never to repeat. Famous athletes, politicians, international ambassadors, the list was impressive.

“And yet, as I leave your home today, I can honestly say I have never in my life felt more

honored to serve anyone as much as you. The courage you have in the face of this trial for you and your son, the sorrow you've endured, the hope you somehow manage to grasp in the face of tragedy... It's mind-blowing. Don't thank me. Let me thank you for allowing me to be even a small part of your story. And if it's not too bold, I just want to remind you that even when it gets ugly, God's not done yet."

With that, he smiled and left. I never saw Dave again, but I remember that day vividly. As I put on my suit on the way to the funeral, I was reminded of a Father who takes care of even the little things. As I donned the suit once again for an interview on national television a few weeks later, I took a deep breath and remembered my Wonderful Counselor, who still has my back in any situation.

And as I wore one of Mr. Bunton's suits into the Oval Office, I smiled slightly at the reminder of my true Ruler, One who would never pass away or forsake me.

I'm not saying life will be easy. It's not, and all this health, wealth, and prosperity nonsense makes me cringe. It's unrealistic and offensive to those who have loss and suffering in their lives. The evil of man and the darkness of our sin nature means that tragedy will keep coming back. But the beauty of our God is that He can use those situations for good, that despite the terror and horror evil throws our way He stands strong. If we let Him, He can use those situations for amazing things, and even as we face trials big and small, whether it's engine trouble in the family car or the grief my family faced, He's got our back. We might not be able to fight, but in Him we can stand, even climb. And some day?

Some day we'll fly.