

Hannah's Heart Chapter T hree

Derision

October 6, 2019



June 15, Monday

It's been a little more than 2 weeks since I first went to the Garden. Nana told me this morning that it would be a good idea to start journaling when I go. I thought it was a good idea, too. I kinda like to write, anyways. And it's nice to talk to... well, who AM I talking to,

anyway? This is going to take some getting used to!! On the other hand, I can say whatever I want to—and *who's gonna correct me?*

So, anyway, I started writing something today. This stuff.

Yours Sincerely,

Hanna

There actually were two more “cool” things that had happened since her journey but writing all this out by hand was frustrating her.

Hanna flipped shut the cover of the notebook she'd been writing in and sat tapping her pen on the cover.

This'd be a whole lot easier if I had a computer of my own ... DAD, she sighed. *He's just so paranoid. Won't let me use HIS half the time because he's working. And when I can use it, he's always around anyway. He's so afraid I'll watch something he thinks I shouldn't on YouTube or something.*

I just want some privacy. He'd FLIP if he ever found out what Nana and I talk about!

Whining wasn't getting her anywhere, and the quest to record in privacy trumped using a keyboard. At least for the moment.

She opened the notebook up again.

PS: There are two cool things that happened since then. Jesus told me that *I should start looking for signs of His love and joy. I didn't have a clue what He was talking about. But two days after I'd been there, I was walking by the playground, down by the creek, and kicking around in the stones there. And I*

found one—a stone—that looked EXACTLY like a white heart! Love! That was cool.

And then after church yesterday when we were at Nana's, you'll never believe what she gave me. It's like she knew! She told me she had been cleaning out one of her china closet shelves, (you should see all the stuff she has crammed in there!) and she found something she wanted to give me. And then she handed me this little, ceramic BLUEBIRD!!!! How cool was THAT???

Anyway. I guess that's all for now.

Sincerely

Hannalee Grisandole James



Mike impatiently hung the phone back in its cradle after four rings.

He didn't have time for this.

Karen should have called these people—I told her I had important things take care of today. I don't have time to be calling around to find something for them to do.

He took the Summer Day camp flyer she'd given him and crumpled it into a ball.

Why should I waste money so they can play? Hannah can take care of him, and it's free.

Reality whispered that he didn't need to be willing to make time for it. And Pride raised its ugly head up high inside him again. Nothing mattered right now but their agenda: keep the man busy. Keep him self-focused. Keep him separated from his family. NEVER allow any talk to wander into the enemy's direction.

“Your work is all that matters, all that has any worth,” the voices in his head continued. “They'll have to cope with their own problems. This is more important. Look how much money this job will bring in? You deserve their admiration—get it! You're the King of this castle—make sure they understand that!”

Pride sneered as it projected these thoughts into Mike's unconsciousness, finding him an easy mark now that they'd managed to build the latest wall of Anger Against Jehovah within him. Manipulating this human away from the things he really needed, things the Ones of Light kept trying to make him see was taking-candy-from-a-baby simple. And

the added bonus of the internal, angry rebellion that ensued in Mike only fed their energy.

Mike turned back to his computer and jiggled the mouse, refreshing the screen that lay before him. Yes. This is going to work. This bunch will make us rich again—if I'm careful.

He had no idea what he was about to agree to. Or where it was going to lead him.

At the moment, he didn't care.



Zindel stood silent in the far corner, arms crossed against his powerful chest, sword sheathed and hanging at his side. Forbidden to interfere, he watched, eyes blazing at the wicked work of his foes.

He spoke quietly to a Messenger, "Give your report to the Scribe of El Olam."

The enemy prevails. Intercession is needed. Incite the others to continue praying.

"I have my orders. Go now."



She must have missed the first part of the diatribe, she'd been so absorbed in her journal. But suddenly she heard the words "Evan Ronald James—WHAT have you been doing!?" come piling up the stairs and through her door.

"What are you doing! You're traipsing mud all through the kitchen. Stop. Stop! STOP!! Right there. Don't move. Just STAND there!" Dad's voice was getting louder and louder.

Uh, oh. Hanna slapped the notebook shut again and jumped up. / *wonder what the Squirt got into this time.* She knew she was going to get it, too. She was supposed to have been watching him but got interested in her journal instead.

"HANNALEE!"

"Coming, Dad. Hold on!"

She ran down the stairs, avoiding her father's anything-but-happy face, and ducked around him. "I'm really, really, really sorry, Dad. I

thought he was playing in the sand box. I'll clean it up, don't worry. I've got it."

Grovel. He never keeps it up when I grovel a little.

"I've warned you about this, Hannalee. Your mother has to work. I have to work. Just because I'm home working doesn't mean I can jump up every ten minutes and find out what kind of trouble your brother is getting into."

He was following her back into the kitchen, building up steam with every step.

"I've told you both. This goes for you, too, Buster!" He began poking one long, hard finger in Evan's scrawny chest. "If there is ONE more incident where I find you're in trouble—and YOU aren't around." Mike James swung his finger around to his daughter. "That's IT!"

At the last second, the thought occurred to him that poking her in the chest wouldn't work. An even more surprising thought flickered through his mind.

Good grief... Doggone it! She's just plain growing up too fast.

He dropped his hand to his side, swung around and started back towards his office doorway. "And I don't want to see ONE SPECK of mud on that floor when you're finished!"

Slam!

Hanna gave Evan the hairy eyeball for a moment, and then walked over to start the faucet. "Get the shoes off. The mop out. Get the bucket. YOU get to mop—I'll get the mud out of your shoes," she ordered as she tested the water temperature with one hand. "Here, give me the bucket."

She knew tears were streaming down the little boy's cheeks. Up to this point, her voice had been anything but loving and kind. She wondered what Jesus would think of her now? A pang went through her heart like a knife, but she was too angry at her father's temper tantrum to care yet.

Evan, shoes still on, walked over to the broom closet, grabbed the mop and bucket and began walking back to his sister.

"No! Don't!" She closed her eyes at the now bigger mess.

"Oh... never mind."

"Love is patient, Love is kind, Love will always help you mind." The birds' twitters voices began singing in her mind. Hanna stopped what she was doing at the sink and turned around to face him.

"Hey," her voice softened. "I've got a better idea." She never could watch him cry. He picked his eyes up to meet hers for the first time. "You

take your shoes and lay them on the back steps in the sun—that mud will need to dry off a while. I'll mop the floor. Just sit there on the stoop until I can get done.

“And *don't go anywhere!*”

She dabbed at his eyes with a napkin and handed it to him.

“Blow.”

“And put it in the garbage on the way out!” she called after his retreating back.

It took a good half hour to finish cleaning up the mess to what she knew would be Dad's expectations. She returned the mop to the closet and walked out the kitchen door to dump the dirty water.

Evan had obeyed. He sat there on the bottom step tracing a pattern in the dirt with a long, thin stick.

She took his shoes and walked out on the lawn, clapped them together good a few times and handed them back.

“What do you say we get permission to go to the school yard and swing a while?” Her little brother's grateful expression said it all.

“Okay. Let me go tell Dad where we're going. Put your shoes on while you're waiting.”



Mike stood with his back to his office door, frowning. He had listened all the while Hanna busily cleaned up her brother's mess, trying to cool back down. They didn't deserve this kind of treatment—but he couldn't seem to control his temper anymore. Feeling guilty, he had answered her timid knock on his door once Hanna was finished. And in an attempt to make it up to her had told her what a good job she'd done. And had given the children permission to go to the playground.

Michael James had never felt so lost, so burdened, so defeated in his life as he did now, living in what he termed a “crackerbox house in a deplorable town.” Over the past four years, everything he'd ever worked for, gained and sweated over, had been stripped of him like a full bathtub someone pulled the plug on.

It was easy to blame God.

So, he did.

Even though it started long before, Mike pinpointed his third son's birth as the beginning. After the flurry of Keith's arrival, diagnosis, and

initial stay in the hospital, the baby had bounced in and out of Intensive Care non-stop. He had stabilized several times, and they had attempted some corrective surgeries, but those would only prove to land him back in the ICU.

Finally, the decision was made to fly him to the huge Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mike and Karen had holed up in a Ronald McDonald's house with no privacy, no space, nowhere to get away. Mike hated being trapped in the City—unable to enjoy and explore; trapped in a hospital room, pacing, while his wife wandered further and further away from them all in her mind.

His mother-in-law's house was a two-hour drive north from there. Putting the children with her got them out of his hair and shortening temper—and kept them from seeing their mother's non-stop tears. It was the best he could think of; the best he could do.

He'd tried to keep his business going through the phone, but a man just can't do it all that way—not without a computer handy, not without space to work.

Karen wouldn't let him leave her side, and he'd feared she was on the verge of a mental breakdown. The kids were... kids.

But she was his heart, his life.

So, he'd watched his life go slowly down the drain, in spite of his posturings, pleadings, and promises to the God he'd settled into a nice, solid box years ago.

One horrible, cold February day the news had come: baby Keith had lost the battle and passed away. By this time, Mike had lost his job, their savings, and eventually—their home. They'd had no recourse. Ever the fighter, Mike had started his own IT business, but they had been forced to move. There had been strained feelings between him and his Tennessee family for years, and he wanted to escape. So, they moved the children out of a bustling, highly academic school district near Nashville, to a one-school-fits-all Pennsylvanian village with a population of only 1,029 citizens.

Breinigsburg.

The very sound of the name made Mike scoff in derision.

The Dump (as Mike thought of it) they now lived in was barely half the size of their Tennessee home, and three times as old—but it was only two blocks away from Nana's. The bungalow had belonged to Nana's best friend, former owner of the local Brundt's Bake Shop. Mrs. Brundt

had passed away, and her children were more than pleased to sell the home to the James' family for a song—as they were the first buyers to even look at it in over a year.

Mike was sure he knew every reason why.

“Their mother ought to be here doing these things,” he muttered to himself. For the ten-thousandth time, he glared up at the ceiling.

“IF You were there, YOU wouldn't have let all this happen. We'd still be in our home; happy. Plenty of money, so Karen COULD be home with a baby and her children. All she ever wanted was to be a mother. All! *And You even took most of that away!*”

His eyes fell on the family portrait they'd had done before the baby had been born. Happy smiles wreathed their faces as they cuddled together in front of a gaily-decorated Christmas tree.

Karen had been 6 months pregnant—six long months filled with endless doctor visits and tests. Hope was on her lips, but the shadows in Karen's eyes burned out at him. The two previous miscarriages had defeated her, robbed her soul of life. She'd been barely hanging on to the hope of the new baby when that picture was taken.

For the Church Directory, of all things!

“But then, You're NOT there, are You? At least not for me. Not for us.

“Not for US.”

Unbeknownst to him, the dark shadow that encircled his heart grew just a little darker—deeper—as though whatever was there somehow increased.

Bitterly, he flung himself away from the door and strode to his desk, knocking the receiver from the phone. It clattered along the desktop, slid off and lay hanging by its curlicue cord—a vacant dial tone obnoxiously filling the air. His frustration over the failed call turned on his wife.

Is that all she thinks they should do? PLAY? What they need is more chores around here. Hannah's old enough to be mowing the lawn. Evan's old enough to ... well, to do something.

Yesterday's mail lay unopened on the corner of his desk.

Bills, bills, bills and more bills.

His mood turning thunderous, he flipped through the envelopes.

What's this now?

The colorful brochure of a church flyer lay tucked in the middle of the mail. It was announcing the soon coming of the summer Vacation Bible School week from First Church in town—the church Nana Anne took the children to. The day it had been announced, the children had **pleaded with him to let them attend, but he hadn't answered them yet. He wasn't ready to give in—yet.**

Is this supposed to be some kind of a hint, Karen? Or did your mother stop by to annoy me?

Nana Anne. Oh, she had been a picture when they had moved here. He could still see her at the door that one Saturday, like a little Banty hen standing there in all her four-foot-ten inches, head held high and bright blue eyes piercing into his.

She had come into the living room, sat down with them and after a few pleasantries, quietly demanded that she be allowed to have the **children on Sundays “for their own good.”**

“This community is small and tight, Michael. You’ve known this from the day you started dating Karen, fifteen years ago. I know you are angry with God. I know you won’t listen to what I’m saying, either. But the children will need to be accepted into the community, the school. With the other children. And if you forbid them to be a part of the only community gathering place we have, they will be shunned by the children AND the parents. Trust me in this—I’ve lived here all my life; my family has been here since the 1700’s.”

At this point, she had turned to plead with her daughter.

“Karen? You know what I’m saying is true. Yes, it’s a backwoods, clique-driven village, but it is what I say.”

Karen had stood up for her. With her. In spite of his protests. And eventually, **he’d conceded that what they were saying was true.**

It was hard to believe that such a place still existed in this modern time, but the families that populated this village had lived here for over 200 years, passing down farms and homes and properties from parent to child **all that time. The James’ had been accepted warmly into the community** because of Anne and Karen (a daughter come home!), and even because they remembered Mike from years ago.

But he was beginning to feel a distance brewing between the **people and himself; he knew that, too. And all because he wasn’t there at the church steps bright and early Sunday mornings.**

He'd used the excuse of his work up until now: getting settled into his computer business, nationwide phone meetings, and time zone differences—but it was growing very, very thin. He realized that. And as angry as he was with the church and God as a whole, he couldn't fight the whole community.

Bitterly, he crumpled the paper up in his hand and tossed it towards the wastebasket.

It missed.

He stood and stared at it for a while.

There's my life, he thought. Nothing but a wadded-up has-been, tossed at the trash.

And I even missed that.

He bent to retrieve the paper and toss it where it belonged.

"No," he swore to himself. "I WILL NOT fall back into the lies from those people!" Two strides took him to his office chair, and he fell into it. Hard.

"Not in Tennessee, and certainly not here.

"Lies. All of it: lies. About prayer. About healing. About 'how much He cares for you.' And where did it all get us? Where did all my hours at that church and tithing and 'toeing the line' and even being a blasted Deacon, for crying out loud... Where did it get us when trouble came? Here! In NoWhere, with a dead bank account, a dead baby, a broken-down old house and a wife that's never here.

"Not for the children. Not for ME."

He shook his fist at the ceiling, then cringed and drew it back.

Just in case...

"No. No more nonsense; no more fantasies and lies. Not in MY house. Not while they're under MY roof.

He thought back to the agreement he'd just signed, the path he'd just decided to take.

These were the real people. This was the real world. This wasn't a Fairytale.



Built in 1798, Breinigsburg had historically accommodated its wealthier families centrally, circling their mansions around the old stone First Church, and allowing servant's quarters to be built out and beyond

the Centre Square of Old Town. This resulted in a modern-day, hodge-podge of aging mansions and tiny, crumbling bungalows on the east side of the village proper. It was in these smaller homes that both the James family and Nana lived.

The majority of houses were found in this part of town, although some were beginning to be built on the other side of the River. And a new apartment building was going up near the high school. The strangers and newcomers who moved into these newer establishments were generally frowned on, having no family ties or history to boast of. Most who did try to shoehorn into the population found themselves leaving again within a few years.

The Village District boasted a total of four streets running north-south through the center, and another three streets running east-west. The middle one of these three, commonly known as Main Street, (although the actual road was called Freidrich's Drive) was comprised of Mr. Schmidt's General and Grocery Store, a few Mom & Pop stores, Napoliano's Pizza, a used-book store and a tiny, one-room Library. And a bank.

The opposite side of the street had a Realtor's office, Spinky's Bar and Pub (with rooms to rent on the upper floor). A newspaper office and the Quality Thrift store that spread out the entire rest of the block. The police station and firehouse were situated not far from the school, one block south of Main, on Cowpath Road

Tippery Elementary School, which was where the children were heading, was conveniently less than a block away from the James' house, preventing them from crossing traffic—should there be any. Its playground wasn't much, but it was somewhere, anywhere, outside of Mike's direct sphere of influence.

"Why is Daddy so angry all the time, Hanna?" Evan dragged the toes of his shoes, each in turn, as they walked along the sidewalk, making a really cool sound. She didn't have the heart to bring up the damage it was doing to them. He'd already had a rough day.

"I think he's still sad, Squirt."

"Sad about what, Hanna?"

Sigh.

She ticked the reasons off on her fingers, at least the ones she'd figured out. "The move. The money. The house. The Village. The car. His job. Mom's job. The bills. Lots about the bills." That's what he complained the most about, anyway.

“Oh. And baby Keith.”

The dragging sound had been replaced by the tap, tap, tap of a stick he’d picked up along the curb.

“Do you think he’ll ever be happy again, Hanna?”

“I don’t know, Squirt.”

“He doesn’t like me anymore.” This last came with a trembly voice again.

“Does he like you?”

“He likes you, Evan. He just... has a hard time keeping his temper these days.”

She turned to him and knelt down eye-to-eye.

“He loves you, Squirt. Don’t you ever forget that.”

Now if I can only convince myself ...

“Did you ever get to see baby Keith, Hanna?”

“Once.”

“How ‘cum only once? Didn’t you like him?”

“Yes, I liked him. I just—didn’t get to go back.”

She reached over and scrubbed his head with her knuckles, smiling at him. Well. Grimacing, anyway.

“I had to take care of you, didn’t I?”

Tears started to spring up, and she stood up, fiercely chasing them away again.

Oh, yes—she remembered that one visit to Keith.



It had been a long ride, and then a scary drive down the Surekill Expressway. Hanna wasn’t sure that was what Nana had called it, but that’s what Daddy did. Cars drove so fast, and they’d weave in and out and all around them so suddenly, Dad was swearing the whole time. And shaking his fist at the windshield. She’d closed her eyes at that part of the ride and held onto her seat belt for dear life, until they finally got off the exit and entered the slower traffic to the hospital.

Even there, everything was scary. It was such an enormous, cold building. They got lost finding the right elevator. Then they got lost finding the right hallway on the floor they did get off on. Dad had come for her by himself, leaving Mom with the baby. And by the time he’d finally found

the right place to dump Hanna off, he'd disappeared again almost immediately.

Said he needed a coffee to calm back down.

Hanna herself was trembling, but he didn't seem to notice.

The room was filled with nurses frowning at her, holding a finger to their lips to make sure she stayed quiet. One finally smiled and took her hand, leading her over to where Mom was sitting quietly beside a clear-sided bassinet.

She had never seen her mother look like this before. Her face was gaunt and white; her eyes had dark circles under them and were all red. When she stood up to greet her daughter, her clothes hung on her, and she almost looked like the bag ladies that used to beg for money on the street corners in Tennessee.

Karen had smiled a little at Hanna, and given her a weak hug, but her mother's voice seemed so far away—like she was speaking from somewhere else. It only added to Hanna's fear.

When she took a peek into the bassinet, she'd almost cried out! There were tubes and wires attached to the baby everywhere, hooked up to beeping and blinking lights on strange-looking machines. He was the tiniest thing she'd ever seen, looking more like a baby monkey than the chubby infants Mom used to play with at her daycare job in Jackson.

The nurses had only allowed her to stay with Mom for fifteen minutes. Dad paced the waiting room in front of her after that, never really talking to her. Just dumb stuff. Questions he didn't want answers to. And his phone kept ringing, so most of the time he wasn't talking to her anyway.

He'd gotten really mad when she'd begged to go home after only an hour or so. He'd been allowed back into the ICU room for his hourly visit, and it had taken her the entire fifteen minutes to work up the nerve to ask. But the whole experience had terrified her.

She just wanted to go back to Nana.

And comfort.

And peace.

Who were these two people who said they were her parents? She didn't know them, not anymore. They were nothing like they used to be. These were strangers, who talked differently, acted differently, treated her differently.

She'd cried all the way back home. Dad had stopped in front of Nana's house and yelled at her to "get out." Then driven off again.

Mike and Karen had stopped talking to their children on the phone after that, too. The phone would ring, and they could hear Nana talking for just a few minutes. Then she'd hang up and stand still for a little while with her eyes closed. Her lips would move like she was praying, only the words never made any sense when Hanna heard them.

If Hanna had come to the phone before they'd hung up, hoping to hear her mother's voice, Nana would just smile down at her. She'd hold her until she was finished, then give her a big hug. Always telling her how much her mother and father loved them.

Really.

Really. They did.



"Race you to the playground!" Hanna suddenly shouted, taking off at a run. She needed to stop thinking, stop remembering.

Squeals of laughter followed her, and she finally smiled, relieved that he'd forgotten the fight and was thinking about the good things to play with ahead of him.

If she'd looked behind her, she'd have realized that wasn't exactly what had happened.

Twenty feet behind her now, Evan stood holding both hands to his mouth, so Hanna wouldn't turn around. Giggling more quietly, he waved at the little boy peering out at him from the middle of a bush across the street. The boy stepped out, waved back with a huge grin, looked up at the tall, white figure towering next to him for a moment. Then they both stepped back into where they'd come from.

Smiling in delight at the secret sighting, Evan prayed happily, "Thank You, Jesus. Oh! I forgot to tell Keith I love him—would You tell him for me, please?"

A second thought came.

"And tell Sophie and Isaac, too—okay?"

He took off at a dead run after his sister, holding a special secret in his heart from the Lord. Maybe tomorrow she'd find out, too?

Well, maybe the next time she talked to Him, anyway.



