

Revival

Al Reimer, *Winnipeg*

Charged with passion the mellifluous voice hangs suspended for a dramatic moment. "Do not delay, my friends, come now, for you know not what the morrow may bring." The white-cuffed arms are outstretched in majestic supplication, the round face luminous with ecstasy. "Yes, yes, tonight our dear Saviour is calling home sinners—you, and you and *you*—get up right now and walk down the aisle to Jesus." The throbbing voice shreds anonymity, sweeps away defenses, closes in on my cringing soul. "Jesus is waiting, he wants you now, this very minute. He will embrace you with loving arms as you weep in repentance. Oh come, dear sinner, come forward—"

Panic washes over me in smothering waves. I have trouble breathing and can no longer think clearly. Gone is my carefully rehearsed scepticism, the intellectual scorn that has catapulted me over moments like this at other times. Not this time. At this moment I know with utter certainty that I'm damned, damned for all eternity if I don't get up and join the thickening columns of people shuffling up the aisles, some sheepish, subdued, with heads down, others, eager with fervor, trying to shoulder their way past the slower ones, their eyes fixed on the shining face of the man in the pulpit, yearning for his sheltering arms.

And then I spot him. I can't believe my eyes. My best buddy, Hank the Pank. No, he wouldn't, not Hank Schroeder. But there he is, his lanky frame looking bent and subdued as he moves forward between his parents, looking like he's under arrest. Hank, Hank—you can't, my mind cries, and I twist from side to side on the hard wooden plank in my agony, feeling utterly betrayed as I watch my best friend, who was forced to sit with his parents tonight instead of with me,

walking up the aisle and out of my life. Don't do it Hank, I almost sob. We were drinking beer together in the bush last night, Hank, how can you do this to me? Rotten bastard! I mutter under my breath, then remember where I am and almost choke with guilt.

“—you come now, you come to Jesus, friends. If there are sinners among you still in your seats, if you want to be saved but are afraid, I plead with you to come forward—now, this very second, for tomorrow may be too late. Jesus loves you all. Rise up and come forward to the Throne of Grace, and you will be washed clean of—”

Desolation overwhelms me, I'm helpless, my world is coming to an end. This nightmare is all that's left. I look up again. Another shock. Corky Penner? Who never goes to church, comes to revival meetings only to scoff and jeer, and is always singing blasphemous songs like “Jesus, lover of my soul, tie me to a telephone pole.” Corky answering the call? What's happening here? My whole world is turning upside down. I look down the aisle again. There goes Judy Loewen, the little bitch. Only last Saturday I tried to feel her up in the back seat of Shag Enns's car. “Busty,” the guys call her because she's so well developed for her age. She's had boobs since she was eleven, and she knows how to truss them up under her sweaters. Then guilt sweeps through me again. How can I even think such things when my world is flying apart in front of my eyes.

“—God bless you, dear friends, thank you for answering His call, the call of our loving Lord Jesus with whom we shall live in glory forever. Amen, amen, praise the Lord!...Are there others among you who feel the burden of your sins, who want to come but are ashamed? Come, my friends, Jesus loves you all, wants to wrap you in his loving arms. Please come, there is nothing to be—”

From my seat near the back I spot Hank the Pank, still standing between his parents amidst the gathering throng of penitents, many openly weeping, forming a ragged semi-circle directly below the pulpit of Dr. Hyman Goldstein, the visiting evangelist from California, who with eyes closed, glistening moon face uplifted, is still exhorting sinners to come forward. This is the mighty Christian spokesman who was converted to Christianity, he likes to say from the pulpit, after a terrible car accident left him so badly injured the doctors gave up on him. But by God's grace he had clung to life. And the worldly doctors were proven wrong. He emerged from a month-long coma with his life balanced in God's scales. God wanted him to live so he could do His work. “Yes, I lost my right arm and my left leg,” he thunders, holding up his black-gloved artificial arm and smartly thrusting out his stiff leg at the congregation below, “but God knew I would still be fit enough to do His work all the same.” Then he breaks into a dazzling grin that can be seen from the last row in the back and adds, “He knew I still had some punch and a little kick left in me.”

While he was still convalescing in the hospital God had sent the Reverend Jackson to him. Ben Jackson became his friend, his confidant, the emissary of Christ who brought him to the Throne of Jesus at last, after revealing to him the errors and pitfalls of Judaism. And his friend Ben had arranged for the new

convert to attend the Florida Bible Seminary, the same inspiring school that had produced the brilliant young preacher Billy Graham, who would some day, Dr. Goldstein predicted, become an evangelist known all over the world.

And now Dr. Goldstein seems to be looking squarely at me as he finishes his altar call. As if he has read my thoughts about him. "This is my final call, dear sinner," he intones with a dramatic drop in his voice. "Please come, don't risk eternal damnation should anything happen to you tonight. Then it will be too late. Come, you come now, come forward to our precious Redeemer so you too can say, 'Yes, praise His name I am washed in the Blood of the Lamb. Oh bless His name forever, Amen.'"

The intensity of that voice pulls me to my feet at last. I can't bear it any longer, I'll go to Hell if I don't get up right now before it's too late. The bald man on my right moves his legs aside to let me pass, but I am riveted to the spot. I literally can't move even though the voice within me is screaming, Go, go, you sinner, save yourself. I look down at the people sitting near me, looking up expectantly at me, ready to break into triumphant smiles and murmur "praise the Lord" as they watch Danny Brandt, that black young sinner who smokes and drinks beer and doesn't go to church regularly anymore, who gets into scraps at school and refuses to get converted even though his father is a respected man in the community, a teacher and a deacon in his church. Some, I know, will gloat and crow as I walk by in the aisle, nudging each other and whispering, "Well, well, look who's finally seen the light—that wild Brandt boy. Praise the Lord." And they'll smile sanctimoniously behind my back and nod their heads wisely...No, I can't do it, I just can't do it. I don't care if the world comes to an end this minute, I won't do it.

Oh God, it's stifling in here, I've got to get out. I don't care if Dad sees me leaving, I can't stay here another second. I stumble past the averted legs and jutting knees, and when I reach the aisle I turn abruptly the other way—away from the dreaded sawdust trail that leads to the front. The main entrance is flanked by two solemn looking young strangers in identical dark suits and brushcuts who converge on me as I make for the door. "You're going the wrong way, young man," one of them whispers urgently and grabs my arm in a vise-like grip. "Turn around—find salvation," the other stage-whispers even more urgently while grabbing my other arm.

With a desperate lunge and a muttered oath I wrench free and charge through the door into the fresh air and twilight of early evening. I'm still gasping for air as I head up the street, not knowing or caring where I'm going. All I want is to get away from the terrible place that has ripped me apart, made me feel as though I'm falling through a bottomless black pit. By running away I've disgraced myself like the coward I am. My parents will never forgive me for this. My stomach suddenly gives a heave and I feel like retching. It's all so horrible. But I won't give in. I'll never give in! I'll get away from here. Join the air force or navy. Go off to fight the Nazis and leave all this crap behind. Then I hear that dreaded voice again, a voice as grim and intimidating as my Uncle Wellm's

whenever he confronts me about the state of my soul and the urgent need for prompt conversion. You are damned, sinner, if you persist in your stubborn defiance, the voice persists. But deep within me another voice arises, less abrasive and even more compelling. Do not give in to fear, to spiritual browbeating, stay true to your real self, keep your mind free and ready for the outside world, this other voice insists.

By the time I reach the lights of Main Street I'm actually smiling to myself. I have my secret voice, my true voice. Nobody can take that away from me. Screw them all. I'd rather be damned and free than saved and remain in this godforsaken town for the rest of my life. That's the desperate faith I cling to after the panic subsides. That harrowing scene took place many years ago, but this is how I have been replaying it more or less on the private stage of memory ever since. Or is it? What unwitting liberties has memory taken with the script over the years? What has been added, what deleted (or suppressed)? Was I really the oppressed, albeit self-pitying young hero memory presents? We know that time panders to memory by providing, bit by bit, self-serving distortions and ego-gratifying revisions of reality. If I had a literal transcript of that evening—and its aftermath—would it differ significantly from my present memory script? I have no way of knowing, so I'm compelled to accept the present version, the only one I have, as the authentic one. But this is only the opening scene. Is all of my memory play—the whole plot, so to speak—predetermined by the whims of memory? Again, I have no way of telling. What I do know unambiguously are the basic facts: that this crisis in my life happened in the summer of 1943 in the Mennonite village of Niedarp in southern Manitoba. I was sixteen, and having my adolescence coinciding with World War II was not one of the luckier breaks of my life.

"What do you mean you felt sick?" my enraged father demanded when I finally got home that evening. "That's just another of your Satan-inspired excuses, Dan. What am I to do with you? Why are you so stubborn and defiant? Will nothing soften our heart? Are you so completely blinded by Satan that you can't see the light?"

Dad looms over me threateningly, his big body tensed and spread like a wrestler about to spring, his face full of anger and frustration.

"Why don't you believe me, Dad? I'm trying to tell you I felt faint and needed air. I just had to get out of that Tabernacle, I couldn't breathe. You know how big crowds affect me. Don't you remember the time—"

"I don't want to hear anymore," my father roars. "You have the nerve to stand there and make excuses to my face when you should be on your knees"—his voice falters suddenly—"asking, no, begging Christ Jesus to forgive your black transgressions and save your soul." He turns away, chin quivering, splaying his fingers over his face as though ashamed to be seen weeping.

Alarmed by his stifled sobs, I mutter a nervous apology: "I'm sorry, Dad, I really am, but I can't force myself to go to the front when I don't feel—"

"—Shame, shame," my father hisses brokenly, "you bring Mother and me

nothing but shame—and yourself.” He takes me by the shoulders, his voice low but intense. “Danny, Danny, even that Schroeder boy you chum with went up tonight with his parents, and you—” The tears meandering down his cheeks look unnatural and his beseeching tone embarrasses me. “Why couldn’t that be you, my son?” He tries to smile. “We want so much to see you find the love of Christ. If only you’d give up your wicked pride and become one of us, get baptized and take your place in the congregation. You have so much to give—if only you would come to your senses, make a change in your life—”

“—Please, Dad, can’t you let me do things my own way? I’m not fighting conversion—if it happens fine, I just don’t want to be threatened and driven into it.” But even as I speak I know it’s useless, a hopeless stab at reaching an understanding. Mom and Dad are both staring at me in aggrieved silence now. They look so wretched. I can’t bear those naked looks, so I say a quick goodnight and make my escape.

Their final weapon, I think bitterly as I head upstairs to my room, is always that sorrowful silence that floods me with fathomless guilt, a feeling of guilt that exasperates me because I’m so powerless to resist it.

In bed I lie rigid beside my sleeping kid brother Dave thinking black thoughts and feeling more miserable than ever. Maybe they’re right, all of them—Dr. Goldstein, Father, Mother, Uncle Wellm, even old Baldy, the *Eltesta*—maybe I’m exactly what they think I am, a stubborn, defiant sinner in the grip of Satan headed straight for the fires of Hell if I don’t change my life. They all say we’re living in the end times. So why take chances? Or what if I die in my sleep tonight? I’ve been having palpitations lately, heart flutters, especially when I put my ear on the pillow trying to go to sleep. I’m convinced there’s something wrong with my heart, something that could lead to a fatal heart attack at any moment. When I mention my fear to my Dad he says I’m imagining things, that he felt the same symptoms at my age. He doesn’t believe in doctors anyway. But I know what I know. There have been moments lately when I felt that my heart was about to explode, bust right out of my ribcage. Just thinking about it I feel hot and sweaty and know that if I turn on my side I’ll hear my heart beating erratically, dangerously.

And then I hear my secret voice again. Stop feeling sorry for yourself, fool. Relax, you won’t die for a long time yet. Never mind getting converted. They’re all trying to manipulate you, make you conform, meek and mild, so you’ll know your place and not rock the boat anymore.

Where does that voice come from? I don’t know and I don’t care. All I know is that it speaks for the real me, and that’s my only comfort. Lying on my side just before sleep comes, I remember that I got away from my parents before they had a chance to make me promise to go to tomorrow night’s rally. And I won’t go, I vow grimly. I damn well won’t go.

And I didn’t go the next night. In fact, when that fateful week was over I never again set foot in the Tabernacle that I can recall, not even for concerts or *saengerfests*. I hated that place so much that just walking past it on Mill Street

made me shiver with revulsion. Years later I heard that when the craze for mass revivals passed and it stopped being the Tabernacle, it was purchased by one of the local car dealers as a warehouse and filled with new and used tires. A fitting end for the place as far as I was concerned. I once had a dream in which I saw stacks of black tires towering up to the rounded dome of the building, which had the semi-circular walls and roof of hockey and curling arenas. And pinned under the stack of tires that stood where the pulpit had been was the squashed figure of Dr. Hyman Goldstein, with his artificial arm and leg sticking out at grotesque angles.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. At the time, my Tabernacle-induced purgatory was far from over. After supper the next evening I sneak out of the house and head uptown to the Treat and Eat, the cafe on Main Street that's our high school hangout, for a much-needed smoke and to shoot the breeze with whoever of the gang happens to be there. The one guy who won't be there is Hank the Pank, the treacherous bastard who's sold us all out. What a pitiful coward Hank has turned out to be. No guts at all. I'm still profoundly depressed by the events of last night. On top of it all, I slept badly, waking up numerous times with terrible feelings of doom and guilt. And palpitations. Towards morning I had a nightmare, my old childish chased-by-a-bear nightmare I thought I'd outgrown long ago. I woke up with a cry of naked terror that woke up Dave, who sleepily asked what the matter was.

Inside Treat I find Foodles Poetker and Gutsy Wiebe smoking tailor mades and drinking Cokes in the front booth. They seem to be celebrating something—talking and laughing like crazy. Foodles must have filched money out of his old man's till again.

They greet me boisterously. "Well, if it ain't Danny, the holy roller," Foodles calls out, expelling diverging jets of smoke from his thick nostrils. "I heard they nailed you at the old Tabernacle last night like they did Hank the Pank. Or was that just a vicious rumor spread by Dr. Goldsteal, the saviour from Hollywood, God's gift to all the Mennonite sinners and backsliders in Niedarp."

I try not to wince as I slide in beside Gutsy. Foodles always goes for the jugular. He and Gutsy come from *Russlenda* families that consider themselves too sophisticated for the emotional hysteria generated by revival campaigns and don't approve of their offspring going to the Tabernacle. At the moment I envy the two guys in the booth with me. Why couldn't I have been born into one of those superior *Russlenda* families? But I can't ignore Foodle's sarcasm.

"Look, Foodles, the day I can't stand up to a windbag like Goldstein is the day I give up and sink to your mental level. Aren't you the guy who's never read a book all the way through and doesn't know shit from sand when it comes to any idea or feeling above your belt buckle? Don't give me any more crap about the revival meetings. I've had enough from my old man already."

Ignoring the barbs, Foodles is immediately solicitous. "Sorry, old buddy, don't be so touchy. I don't know what this crazy world is coming to when regular guys like Hank and Corky Penner snivel up to the front. Not to mention a stacked *poppje* like Busty Loewen. Boy, I'd like to convert her right up—"

“—Can that stuff, Foodles,” I cut in, annoyed. “Don’t add blasphemy to all your other sins, you shameless bugger.”

Before Foodles can counter the door opens and Hank Schroeder sidles in with this queer look on his face, as if he isn’t sure whether to charge ahead or retreat in confusion. The strange light in his eyes intensifies when he spots us. Then he is standing over our table, waving away the ragged trails of smoke hanging over it. He looks fierce and determined, then cracks a smile that looks forced.

“Can I sit down with you, fellas?”

His formality sounds even more forced. What does he want? Foodles shoves over to the wall, looking at Hank suspiciously. But it’s obvious now that Hank’s concern is with me, only with me. He doesn’t even glance at the other two, just fixes his fanatical stare on me.

“I was hoping I’d find you here, Dan. Ever since the miracle happened to me last night I’ve been thinking of you. You don’t know what a wonderful feeling it is to be saved. Praise the Lord! All my sins washed away. I feel light as a feather. You can have the same experience, Dan. I want to talk to you”—for the first time he glances over at Gutsy and Foodles—“maybe we could go for a walk and have a chat before we go to the meeting. I want you to sit with me there—will you do that, Dan?”

I stare at Hank in disbelief. Is this my life-long buddy? This mealy-mouthed, sanctimonious bastard coming here to soften me up for the Great Evangelist? But when I speak I try to keep the contempt out of my voice. I feel sorry for poor old Hank.

“I don’t want to hurt your feelings, Hank, old bean. But don’t you think you’ve got a nerve coming in here and talking to me like this?” I lean forward. “This is Dan, your old pal, you’re talking to. What’s gotten into you anyway, Hank? I don’t know you when you talk this way. Hey man, don’t we drink beer together and talk about girls and the war and how we’ll join up next year? Let’s smarten up here. Tell me this is all a joke, Pank.”

Hank blushes but his eyes are as intent as ever. “Danny, Danny, you’ve got to listen to me. You’re a sinner in need of salvation. Yeah, you’re my buddy, that’s why I want to help you. It’s you that needs smartening up. You’re lost Dan. I’ve seen the light—Christ Jesus—and I know, I know!” His eyes look wild and he jerks his hand out to touch mine.

I draw back, nettled now. “Damn it, Hank, leave me alone. Have you gone plain nuts?” I look at Foodles and Gutsy playing with their Coke bottles and enjoying the scene, especially my embarrassment. I turn back to Hank. “Look man, either you cut out this conversion stuff or you can get the hell out of here. Or I will if you don’t.”

I try to slide out of the booth, but in a swift move Hank grabs my wrist and tries to keep me in my place. “Please, Dan, you’ve got to listen to me. This is your big chance. I’m your friend and I want to help bring you to Jesus.” Still gripping my wrist hard, he adds: “Let’s go for a walk and talk about it.”

"I'm not going anywhere with you, you dumb bastard. You're crazy. I don't know you. You want to be a religious nut like the others in this godforsaken town go ahead, just leave me out of it." I manage to break Hank's hold with a savage twist that sears my wrist.

I head for the door, Hank at my heels. On the sidewalk he grabs me again, still pleading. "Danny, listen to me, you're going straight to—"

"—Bugger off, Schroeder. I mean it." My temper flares and I have a powerful urge to sock Hank right in the nose. And to my amazement I do, just as he is making a move to embrace me. Blood spurting from his nose, Hank staggers back against a stout lady who is at that moment trying to sidestep around us. Hank and old Mrs. Reimer collapse together in a wild tangle of arms and legs.

Later, I'm unable to recall the scene in proper sequence. I remember only broken moments and isolated images, like staring down at the vast expanse of Mrs. Reimer's pink bloomers emerging from the dark tunnel of her long skirt. And helping her, puffing with outrage, to her feet, apologizing profusely while she berates me as a godless ruffian who belongs in communist Russia. At some point Eltesta Toews, old Baldy, came along and gave me a harsh lecture studded with threats and intimidations. Was that before or after Hank the Pank, holding a rumpled handkerchief to his nose with one hand, grabbed me again with the other and tried to pull me in the direction of the Tabernacle? I also have confused impressions of other people, on their way to the rally, stopping to stare and shake their heads over this new manifestation of the Brandt boy's disreputable conduct in public.

I don't dare go home till after midnight, hoping my parents are asleep and I can sneak up to my room so as to delay the inevitable at least until morning. No such luck. Dad is waiting for me at the door and shocks me by actually raising his fists and threatening to hit me, he is so beside himself with pent-up fury. In the end I get off with the worst tongue-lashing I've ever received, but not before I'm forced to promise that I will attend the Tabernacle meetings for the rest of the week. At the same time I'm forbidden to go anywhere else in the evenings for a whole month, or until I sincerely repent and become, in my father's words, "a new, completely remade human being washed in the blood of the Lord." I'm allowed to go to bed at last, feeling even lower and more confused than the night before and certain that life will never be the same for me again.

Five or six weeks later, on a balmy Saturday evening at the end of June, four of us are sitting around a small fire in the dense pine woods just west of town swigging warm beer and roasting wieners on freshly cut, green willow sticks. An open twenty-four sits in the shadows behind us. We're in a jolly mood, celebrating the end of departmental exams and summer freedom, but instinctively keeping our voices low so as not to draw trespassers, especially guys who might cut into our precious supply of beer.

"Why'd you get this Standard piss, Mel," Foodles demands in his usual diplomatic way, then swears in *Plautdietsch* as his sweating wiener drops off the

end of his stick into the fire. "Select is the only real beer," he adds as he tries in vain to spear his wiener, gives up and reaches down for a fresh one from the package lying on the log that serves us as a bench.

"You can shove your Select, Foodles. Just be thankful we got a case at all. If I hadn't run into Bert Wiebe on Main Street this afternoon, we might not have found anybody to get it for us. Bert says he and other guys home on leave have to be more careful from now on. He says the guys in the pub are on to us, and servicemen could get into trouble supplying beer to minors."

"Shi-it, man," Gutsy adds his two cents, "they're always saying that but they don't do nuthin'. That's all just talk. This is wartime, Dan, things are different in wartime."

I look over at Hank the Pank sitting on the log intent on roasting his wiener. He takes a long swallow from the bottle he keeps clamped carefully against the log at his feet.

I raise my bottle high. "Here's to us, guys—no more exams, I'm free again and so is Hank. Welcome back to the real world, Hank. For a while there I thought you were a goner, old buddy. Your sure had the old missionary zeal. You scared the shit out of me that night you came into the Treat with that wild look in your eyes and I had to bop you one."

Hank keeps his head down as he concentrates on taking his sizzling wiener off his stick and popping it deftly into a bun. "Well, yeah, I guess I got a little carried away there. I dunno, guys"—he looks up at each of us in turn, searchingly—"maybe I did go a little crazy, but I believed it all at the time. Don't think I wasn't sincere. I'm no hypocrite." He looks belligerently at us, daring us to contradict him. Then stares at the fire, suddenly subdued and defensive. "You know damn well we'll have to shape up in the end, accept things as they are, and that means getting converted for good, getting baptized, joining the church, and all that stuff."

"That's where you're dead wrong, Pank," I say firmly, blowing the flame off my blackened wiener and reaching for a bun. "I don't believe in going up and down like a spiritual yo-yo and then just because you want to get married you get converted and join the church. To hell with that noise." I chuckle as a new thought strikes me. "At least nobody can accuse Foodles and Gutsy and me of being a fallen-off like you."

"Yeah, man, yeah, a fallen-off." Foodles and Gutsy show their approval of my sally by simultaneously draining their bottles and incautiously flinging them into the darkness. One of the bottles hits a pine trunk and drops with a thud, unbroken. "Couldn't agree with you more, Dan," Foodles says exuberantly. "If my future wife—whoever the lucky bitch may be—wants me to join the church I will—maybe—but I sure as hell won't get converted first, you can bet on that." He pries open a fresh bottle on the serrated cap lip of another and hands the already hissing unopened bottle to Gutsy.

Hank, munching his hot dog, looks a bit cowed. "All right, guys, rub it in. But you just wait, one of these days you'll wake up and not be so cocky. Life is

serious in this town and you can't get by here forever as a rebel bucking the current, not unless you want to get a reputation like Gumshoe Jake or that drunken turd Duck Janz. If you want to amount to something around here you've got to—"

"—shape up, Hank?" I finish for him. "Not me, buddy, I'm shaking the dust of this blasted darp off my size elevens as soon as I can. You're dead wrong, Hank. Your idea of amounting to something is to swallow all the religious crap they feed you, let them beat you into the shape they want with threats and fear and gruesome pictures of burning in Hell. That's not making it, that's letting yourself get done in, condemned to a Mennonite prison for life. As far as I'm concerned the only way to make it in this world is to take off and get free—free, man!" I wave my foaming bottle in a wide arc that ends at my mouth as I tip over the neck. "Here's to joining the air force or navy next summer, or even the bloody army if we have to." I fill my mouth with the warm, live beer, then spew it playfully in a fine spray over the fire and Hank's wiener.

"I'll drink to that, oh Danny boy," Foodles speaks into the silence.

"Yeah, me too," Gutsy me-toos with a wicked grin.

"I don't know..." Hank trails off uncertainly, wiping the beer off his wiener and looking at me reproachfully.

"That's right, you don't know, you silly bugger." I'm a little drunk, but reach over and pat Hank on the shoulder affectionately. "At least enjoy yourself for now and don't ask for the old horse collar before it's put around your neck."

I take another hefty swallow, smile hugely at my friends, their faces eerily lit up by the flames fingering up in the night sky, and wonder why I don't feel more elated, more victorious. Maybe I will tomorrow, after my hangover wears off.

Sunday afternoon I'm lying on my bed still nursing a slight headache and idly leafing through the latest *Time* that my Dad subscribes to. Headache and all, I suffered through church in the morning, as per the latest agreement with my parents, in return for free evenings away from home. But I'm still on probation, and I know it. Old Baldy is supposed to be coming over for *faspa* today, but I know it's not a casual social call. I'll be expected to be present and am already bracing myself for the stern *praedijcht* I'm sure to get from the old bore.

And then I spot the item in the "News in Brief" section. I sit bolt upright reading the lines avidly and with a growing sense of elated vindication:

Dr. Hyman Goldstein, noted California-based traveling evangelist who has conducted mass revival campaigns all over North America, was arrested this week on charges of fraud and embezzlement of campaign funds. Dr. Goldstein has denied the charges, alleging that his accusers are Jews trying to destroy him for having embraced the Christian faith. A trial date has not been set.

I bounce on my bed in glee. I knew it, I just knew there was something fishy about the guy. Then I think of Dad and leap to my feet.

I'm on my way to my Dad's den with the copy of *Time* held open before me like a hymnal when I'm struck by a new thought. I know my old man. He'll read the item in his slow, thoughtful manner, ponder it for a few seconds and then

explain it all away. Already I can hear him saying, “Dan, Dan, do you really think God’s work, the Great Commission, stands or falls on the strength or weakness of any one of His servants? Dr. Goldstein may have been weak, as stated here, or he may be accused falsely by Satan’s minions, as he claims, but you can be sure of one thing, my boy: God’s Will will be done in this case as it always is. The souls gathered for the harvest will remain gathered no matter what the harvester is or does.”

In my mind’s eye I see the strong, unrelenting face of my Uncle Wellm, so overpoweringly assured of his faith. Then I see the troubled, confused face of Hank the Pank.

Slowly I go back to my room, the *Time* furlled in my hand. Let Dad discover the item for himself. Old Baldy and Uncle Wellm of course will never see it. They would never read a worldly magazine like *Time*.

Now that I’ve told my story I realize that memory has, as usual, provided form without resolution. I still don’t know what effect, if any, this turbulent summer of my youth had on my subsequent life. Again, I’m compelled to resort to the incontrovertible facts that rise sharply above the misty landscape of memory.

Hank and I (Foodles and Gutsy chickened out) did go to Winnipeg the following summer to join the RCAF. Hank was accepted. I was rejected for a heart murmur (my palpitations had not been imaginary, after all) and, I suspect, for my two missing toes, and so classified as 4-F, to my everlasting disappointment and my parents’ prayerful relief. Hank the Pank was sent to England with one of the last batches of RCAF trainees and assigned to a Lancaster bomber crew as a tail gunner. He never came back, unless you count the remains that were flushed out of his shattered turret after his badly crippled aircraft limped back to its base in England.

Funny thing. When I watch the overheated spiritual hucksters on TV nowadays, I can’t help smiling with amused contempt. Not one of them—not even the gracefully ageing Billy Graham—could hold a candle to Dr. Hyman Goldstein, whose eventual fate I never learned, but who could teach these latter-day TV saints a thing or two about spellbinding altar calls.