

Hearts OF FIRE

Eight Women *in the*
Underground Church
and Their Stories
of Costly Faith



VOM
BOOKS

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Many of the names and places in this book’s testimonies have been changed to protect the identities of those represented. It was also necessary to omit details concerning ministry activities that continue within these nations to protect the lives of those involved. Some court transcripts and other quoted materials have been edited for brevity and clarity.

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Adel

Amid the Horror... Hope

INDONESIA

5:00 P.M., MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2000

Under the shadow of swaying palm trees, Adel gathered the children together, about fifty of them. Her voice rose as she began to sing “Onward, Christian Soldiers.” She could see the fear in the children’s eyes as they joined in the song.

“I don’t want to die!” one of the children called out. He was not yet ten years old.

“We’re not going to die. Come, clap your hands with us.” Adel leaned toward him, speaking directly into his ear to be heard above the children’s voices.

The scared boy reluctantly joined in. They sang another song, again clapping their trembling hands together. Adel was attempting to drown out the shouting—the screams and the terror—drifting up the hillside from less than a mile below.

She knew she had to keep the children from crying, especially the older ones. If one of them started wailing, there would be mass hysteria. Adel admired their bravery. Even the other parents who

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were clustered in small groups around the children seemed to gain strength from their spirited youngsters.

As the singing continued, Adel gazed over the assembled youth and spotted her own two children. Christina was already nine, and Christiano, seven. Adel could be brave, she reassured herself; she could be brave for her children—all the children. Her trust was firmly rooted in Christ. She worried about them, though—especially Christiano, her little “Anto.” He was so young, and small for his age.

Adel silently prayed for God’s protection and again was thankful she’d grabbed her Bible before fleeing her home. She opened it now, carefully turning the worn pages to a familiar passage, and read aloud: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Then Adel flipped to the back of her Bible, where numerous songs were printed, and she led the children in another chorus.

While they were singing, some of the children began complaining that they were hungry and thirsty. They had been on the hill since noon, and now the setting sun cast a vivid, tawny glow over the sky. Sunsets could be so spectacular here on their small Indonesian island of Dodi. But today the twilight was an ominous prelude to the darkness about to fall on their village.

Suddenly the shouts of her husband, Methu, pierced through the children’s singing. “Run! Adel, run!” Adel rushed to the edge of the hill and struggled to see in the waning sunlight. She could barely make out the silhouettes of men scrambling up the steep trail. Again Methu’s voice rang out. “Take the children, Adel! Hurry! You must run into the jungle.”

Instead, Adel froze, paralyzed by the crackling sounds of fire now drifting up the hillside as smoke ascended into the darkening sky. *They have set the entire village ablaze.* Every house would be consumed, she knew, including her own.

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She agonized over the choice she must make. Should she help Methu as he made his way up the rocky embankment, or should she run to her children? It was all happening too fast. In the same way a person's life can pass through her memory in an instant, Adel's past and future now collided in her mind. Two wonderful children . . . a loving husband . . . life had been good.

She turned toward the children, then glanced one last time at Methu. And in that instant, she remembered an uninvited, audacious seventeen-year-old who had stubbornly seated himself on her mother's couch . . .

“Only God Can Separate You Now”

JULY 1989

“Mom, he looks like a monkey!” Adel hissed, peeking out from the kitchen door toward the young man waiting in the living room.

Her mother was not impressed. Adel might be too young to get married, but she could still show a little respect and appreciation for the young man's relentless determination.

He arrived at their house at approximately the same time each day. Adel didn't know if she was more flattered or annoyed as, each day, Methu confidently settled himself on the couch and repeated the same request. Actually, Adel had answered him numerous times, but Methu was either refusing to accept her answer or just pretending not to hear her.

“I don't want to get married. I'm too young. And even if I did want to get married, I don't want to marry *you!*” Adel persisted. She was seventeen too, and her beauty had recently blossomed. But she had no interest in starting a relationship—although she certainly had plenty of opportunities.

Methu offered no argument nor took offense at her impetuous

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remarks. He just sat there and patiently explained again to Adel that she was to be his wife. “It is God’s plan. Even if you think I look like a monkey.”

Adel chuckled as she caught the hint of her mother’s smile. Undeterred, Methu once more made his request: “So, will you marry me?”

She knew there was no logic in answering, so Adel just sat there, wondering when he would go away. Finally Methu got up to leave, but before departing he removed his outer shirt, folded it neatly, and placed it on her lap. “There,” he said. “You won’t answer me, so my shirt will wait in my absence.”

Adel couldn’t help being flattered by his youthful yet sincere gesture. Maybe he wasn’t so bad after all . . .

Three months later, Adel and Methu were married.

It was a traditional wedding according to local customs. It started early on a bright October afternoon and went long into the night. Two complete meals were served to the entire village that came out to witness the joyous event. It all seemed to go by in a flash as Adel fought off intermittent waves of anxiety, worrying again that she was too young and marriage was a terrible mistake. She was the first among seven siblings to marry; how could she possibly comprehend her new obligations as a wife? Only the words of the pastor after the ceremony brought the new bride comfort. “Adel,” he had told her, “only God can separate you and Methu now.”

Adel became pregnant a month after the wedding, and although she carried the baby full term, the child was stillborn after a long and intensive labor. Adel and Methu were devastated.

But five months later, Adel was pregnant again. This time the baby was born three months early and wasn’t expected to live. Friends who came to visit comforted Adel and encouraged her to “be strong when the baby dies.”

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“My baby’s not going to die!” Adel answered obstinately. Her heart was entirely convinced, and she refused to be swayed by the opinion of her family or neighbors. She would *not* lose another child.

Adel gently laid her newborn daughter on a pillow and softly spoke to the tiny girl, praying to God at the same time. “Why are you here, Christina?” she whispered. “You didn’t reach your full time in my womb, but here you are. And even though you are so small, Methu and I love you so much. And I know God is going to protect you.”

To the amazement of her family and the villagers, Christina developed into a healthy toddler and was joined two and a half years later by her brother, Christiano.

Adel and Methu couldn’t have been happier. Soon after Christiano was born they moved into their own home. It was a simple three-room house made mostly from bamboo, and it had a dirt floor. It was humble, but it was theirs. Perhaps when the children were older they could afford a better, larger house. That would be something to look forward to. For now, though, they were happy just to be out from under the roof of Methu’s parents.

Nearly all the families of Adel’s village were Christian, and she enthusiastically assisted with the church’s youth programs. There were more than fifty children close in age to Christina and Christiano, and Adel loved to read them the same exciting Bible stories her grandfather had once read to her. It seemed fitting that she was now doing the same work as her grandfather—preaching the gospel—even if it was to neighborhood children.

The Impending Jihad

Life passed with little trouble for Adel and those in her village, until the neighboring Muslims paid their first “official” visit.

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Although she wouldn't realize it at the time, the nightmare actually started at 3:00 p.m. on September 9, 1999—a day that, looking back, Adel will never forget. At the sound of a nearby commotion she hurried outside and immediately caught sight of the banner. On it only two words were printed in large block letters: "*Cinti Damai*," meaning "Love Peace." Clustered around the banner were thirty men, women, and children from a Muslim village named Dahma.

"People of Dodi," a dark-skinned, middle-aged man proclaimed, "we are your neighbors, and we should commit to each other to live in peace." There was no sound system, but his booming voice flowed easily through the crowd. He stood tall and lean on the old wooden platform of the meeting house. There should be no misunderstandings or fighting between the Muslim and Christian villages, he said. They should all live in peace.

Adel and the others who had crowded around the platform thought this was peculiar considering there hadn't been any previous confrontations, but they extended a hand of friendship to their visitors, who stayed the remainder of the afternoon.

Later that evening, after Methu had returned from work in the local mines, Adel related the events. "But what about the rumor?" Methu questioned.

A strange piece of gossip had been circulating that the ninth day of the ninth month of 1999 would be a dark day for Christians on the island of Dodi. However, Methu and Adel had dismissed the rumor as just that. Now they considered the Muslims' visit and agreed there seemed to be no apparent threat. Actually it had been a jovial atmosphere as their children played together.

Nearly four months passed without an incident or cause for suspicion, and the Dodi residents assumed the rumor was unfounded—until just after Christmas, when Yulpus, a young merchant, returned to the village after a failed attempt to leave

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the island. Seeing him again so soon after he had left, the villagers asked him why he had returned so quickly.

“They wouldn’t let me leave,” Yulpius announced.

“Who? Why not?” one man asked as others pressed forward with increasing anxiety.

Yulpius continued, “A number of Muslim men stopped me, and I don’t know why. At first they simply told me not to travel right now, that it was too dangerous. I protested and told them I needed to leave the island to get more supplies, but they didn’t seem to care. They got really aggravated and seemed offended that I was a Christian. I recognized some of the men as ones who were part of the group that visited us to proclaim the so-called peace. I didn’t want any further trouble, so I turned around and came back home.”

Adel, Methu, and many others started to mull over Yulpius’s story, rethinking the events of September 9. But with no evidence of imminent danger, there was little they could do. Then, on January 10, their worst fears swept through their village like a rampant storm.

Adel was resting with an ailing Christiano around noon when they were awakened by the sounds of a commotion among the neighbors. Adel ran out her front door and gasped at the sight of large columns of smoke rising in the distance. A nearby village—a Christian village—was burning. Then came the rising shouts of panic. They must flee their homes. Three thousand armed Muslims were on their way, and there was little hope of stopping the impending *jihad* (Arabic for “holy war”).

Adel ran back inside, yelling for Christina and Anto. But no one answered. The pounding in Adel’s heart grew louder as she frantically searched for her children, running back outside and screaming their names. Finally someone told her they had been seen already making their way up the hill behind the village. Adel

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ran back inside once more to hurriedly grab a few things. As she headed again for the door she spotted her Bible on the table. She grabbed it . . . and fled.

“Mom, Are We Going to Die?”

6:00 P.M., MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2000

Methu and the other village men had held off the Muslim attackers for nearly four hours, but there were simply too many of them, and they were well armed with machetes, torches, and firearms.

Now the entire village was ablaze, and the mob’s shouts of “*Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar!*” (“God is great! God is great!”) filled the air. Methu and the other men frantically fled up the slippery embankment, hoping the *jihad* warriors would be satisfied with the destruction of their village. Instead a sadistic rage seemed to spread among them, and soon they were also scrambling up the hill, wildly firing their rifles in the direction of the assembled Christians.

Methu and Adel swiftly gathered their children and their own elderly mothers as everyone began fleeing in different directions. Hoping to avoid the rampant gunfire, they threw themselves into the deep grass and proceeded to crawl as quickly as possible into the jungle. But the strenuous journey on their hands and knees proved more difficult as a heavy rain began to fall, turning the bare ground into a continuous pool of mud.

After crawling for almost two hours through the dense jungle, they came to an abandoned shed on the edge of a coconut plantation. Constructed of wood with three sides and a roof, it had been used by farmers as a respite from the sweltering afternoon heat during harvesttime. Hopefully, tonight it would serve as a sanctuary for the weary family. They were too exhausted to travel any farther.

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Christina and Christiano fell asleep almost immediately as Adel laid them down on a bamboo mat they found in the deserted building. Like the rest of the family, the children were soaking wet and covered with mud. And while the deteriorating structure provided some shelter, the roof was full of gaping holes allowing steady trickles of rain to fall on them.

Adel couldn't hold it in any longer. Like the rain, the tears poured down her face as she wept aloud.

When she had regained control, she and Methu huddled together for a brief and somber time of prayer, then they quietly sat with each of their mothers throughout the fearful night. As dawn broke, Christina and her brother awoke, slowly coming to understand that the horrific nightmare they thought they had dreamed was, in fact, reality. For some time they sat silently, staring at the adults. Their wide eyes begged for a few words of comfort, but a deathly silence overshadowed the frightened family and no one knew what to say.

Finally Christiano whimpered, "Mommy, I'm hungry."

Adel's eyes closed again as she tried to hold back the tears, but by the time she could bring her young son into her lap, she was weeping uncontrollably.

"Please don't cry like that, Adel," Methu pleaded. "I'll go look for food." He tried to reassure his wife, but he knew she had reached her limit. Adel's heart was being ripped apart as she helplessly witnessed the suffering of her precious children.

Methu was going back to the destroyed village to look for food. Adel begged him not to go, but she knew they had to do something. They couldn't remain in the shed without food or water.

Time seemed to pass in slow motion after Methu left. A deep sense of fear continued to grip Adel. Unable to fight the anxiety, she led her family back into the jungle. They eventually came upon others from their village who were hiding along the edge of

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a cornfield. Adel led Christina and Anto and the mothers through the neat rows of corn, and they began picking the dried ears. At least they would have something to eat.

A few hours later Methu rejoined his family carrying twelve cans of Coca-Cola. It was all he could find. But as the children reached for the tabs to open the cans, gunshots rang out, echoing like rolling thunder throughout the field. No one knew which direction the shots were coming from, so they threw themselves to the ground, having no clear thought of where to run. Finally Christina looked up at Adel and asked, “Mom, are we going to die?”

Yes, we are, was the thought that ripped through Adel’s mind, but she knew she had to be brave for her children. She pulled both of them together and told them everything would be OK. But Adel knew her words of comfort couldn’t replace the dreadful reality of their situation. As the sounds of gunfire continued, she knew what she had to do. It would be the most difficult conversation she would ever have with her children, but Adel had no choice. She had to tell them . . .

“Christina and Anto, please look at me and listen very carefully. If we are caught by those of the *jihad*, they will ask you if you want to become a Muslim. If you say no, they may kill you.” Adel looked directly into the children’s eyes. She knew there was only one right answer, but how could children so young be expected to be so brave?

Both her children answered simply, “We want to follow Jesus.”

Without a second thought, Adel opened the Bible she had brought with her and turned to the one passage that had continually run through her mind since she had fled her home. Adel’s grandfather had read it to her so many times as a child it was practically etched into her heart: Psalm 23. She instructed her two children to repeat after her and began reciting the words, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want . . . Yea, though I walk

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through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me . . .” She continued until both of them had committed the psalm to memory. They appeared so brave, but Adel wondered if they truly comprehended the gravity of the situation.

Feeling the tears forming again in the corner of her eyes, she hastily wiped them away with the back of her hand and asked, “Christina, aren’t you afraid they may kill you if you say you are a Christian?”

Christina brought her face close to her mother’s, looked straight into her eyes, and softly answered, “Mom, please don’t worry. I’m not afraid to die.”

After the gunshots ceased, those in the cornfields eventually scattered. Adel, Methu, and their family made their way back into the dense jungle, where they traveled wearily for another two days. They walked well into the darkness of night and slept only a few hours before rising again at dawn. At one point Methu had met others from their village and learned from them that some Christians had already been killed. Worried for his loved ones, he just pushed them deeper into the jungle.

Everyone was exhausted, and finally Methu and Adel realized they could not push the children any farther. Although they had a small amount of fresh coconut milk, the hunger pains were growing worse, and Adel cried each time one of the children asked for food. They had also met up with Methu’s father and brother.

They came to what Methu believed would be a safe place to rest, and he gathered some dry palm leaves for the children to sit on. Hearing the rippling sounds of a stream below the ravine, he and his brother decided to venture down to see if they could find something to eat.

At such a tender age, Anto didn’t understand why they hadn’t had any food in the last few days and bluntly asked if he could

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have some rice and fish. “Your father will be right back, and maybe he will have some fish. Then we can eat,” Adel told him, attempting to offer some encouragement. But she knew it wasn’t likely that Methu would find food for them, and she pulled Anto close, softly humming a chorus and gently rocking him.

The All-Powerful Blood of Jesus

Less than ten minutes had passed when she heard Methu scream. At first Adel thought he was crazy to yell like that, knowing the *jihad* warriors could be close by. Then she realized Methu had already been surrounded, and he was yelling for Adel and the rest of the family to flee. Again she heard the words that had chilled her heart just a few days earlier. “Run, Adel! Run!”

Before Methu could cry out again, Adel heard the rapid crackle of an automatic weapon. She immediately pushed herself up but with Anto’s arms still wrapped around her neck, she stumbled. She turned just in time to catch a glimpse of Christina running in the direction of Methu’s cries. Adel drew a breath to yell at her to stop, but it was too late. They were surrounded by men in long white robes.

Anto was lying on the ground where Adel had dropped him. When he tried to get up, one of the men swung his machete and caught him across the back with the broad side of the blade. Adel screamed at the top of her lungs and threw herself on her son to protect his small body from another blow. She could see her son’s face turning white with fear as he slipped into shock, but her attempts to help Anto proved useless as one of the Muslim men grabbed her long black hair and easily lifted her into the air.

A bloodstained machete was pressed against Adel’s neck as the men forced her toward a pair of bamboo trees. She knew their intentions as they began tearing at her clothing. She was still

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clutching her Bible, but it fell to the ground as easily as her clothes. Adel closed her eyes, silently praying for her family and begging God to save her from being raped.

Adel then heard the screams of her mother, her mother-in-law, and her precious Anto, and she knew they were being massacred by the vicious thugs who had driven them from their home. It was too much to bear. On the edge of fainting, she fell to her knees as she saw those who had attacked her family turn and come toward her. Blood dripped from the edges of their machetes. Anto's blood.

"Oh, God!" Adel cried. She didn't know how she could go on. One of the men took off his sweaty turban and tied it around Adel's head. On it was written "*Allah Akbar.*" With her last bit of strength Adel shouted, "The blood of Jesus is all-powerful!"

"She is a Christian! A pig! A stinking pig! Let's just rape her and get it over with," a voice sneered. A larger number of enraged Muslims now surrounded Adel, discussing what to do with her. They were speaking in their local dialect, not realizing Adel could understand everything they were saying.

Attempting to conceal her tears, Adel quietly prayed in her heart, *Lord, please help them realize what they are doing. It is so evil . . . please make them understand. They cannot know what they are doing. It isn't humanly possible.* As she continued to pray, from the commotion in front of her a hushed, soft voice whispered, "Adel, is that you?" She looked up to discover a man they had captured from her village. His name was Hans.

Hans had also been stripped naked and was bleeding severely. Her heart fell deeper into despair; she was certain he would not survive the day. She asked him if he had seen Methu or Christina. He shook his head no.

One of the men bundled up Adel's clothing, shoving it into her arms. She was not allowed to put it on. She looked down at

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her Bible, which had been torn to shreds.

The two captives were marched up a steep mountain trail with machetes prodding the most vulnerable parts of their beaten bodies. As the trail narrowed, Adel looked down over the ridge, realizing how high she was and how easy it might be to jump. She knew she would probably be killed if she jumped, but that was OK. *Help me, Lord! Please, help me*, she continually pleaded. Resisting the temptation to jump, she finally came to the top of the mountain, where well over a thousand *jihad* warriors were gathered. They were of all different ages, some barely teenagers, but each was dressed exactly the same in a long white robe with a tightly wound turban on his head.

At gunpoint, one of the soldiers forced Adel and Hans to stand one behind the other. The soldier was middle-aged with broad shoulders. He laid his rifle by his side and slowly removed a long machete from its sheath. Adel looked around, realizing she and Hans were the only two Christians in a sea of white robes. She closed her eyes, believing, even hoping, it would finally be over.

Within seconds, she felt the warm flow of blood running down her face and body. “The blood of Jesus is all-powerful!” she screamed again and again. Hans was screaming too. And she could hear the angry voices of other men yelling and chanting in the distance. She dared not open her eyes. If she just kept them closed long enough, she thought, she could open them on the other side, in heaven. But after waiting for what seemed like hours, she couldn’t help but lift her eyelids. In front of her was the mutilated body of Hans.

Seven Simple Words

Adel was covered with blood but couldn’t tell if it was hers or Hans’s. She was in severe pain from the repeated blows of the

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Muslim men, but there didn't appear to be any open wounds on her body. Her voice was getting weak now, but she managed to repeat the words: "The blood of Jesus is all-powerful." Somehow she knew God was protecting her. She should have died many times by now. Over five hours had passed since they had stripped her of her clothing and started beating her. She already knew Anto, her mother, Methu's mother, and Hans were dead, and she suspected the others were too. But she was still alive, and there had to be a reason why. Amid the horrible assaults, Adel somehow felt an amazing glimmer of hope.

The band of *jihad* warriors gathered their weapons and told Adel it was time to leave. She would be their guide, they said. They shoved her to the front of the forming line, and she led them down a winding road on the opposite side of the mountain. Adel had no thought of where they were going. She simply walked in a state of semiconsciousness and tried to shake the sounds of Hans's brutal execution and the sight of his mutilated body from her mind. Not satisfied with cutting him to pieces, the men had covered his body with leaves from the surrounding coconut trees, poured gasoline over the pile, and lit his corpse on fire.

When they reached the bottom of the mountain, Adel was no longer needed as a guide. The men pushed her in the direction of Dahma, their village, continually pulling her long hair, taunting her, and smacking her naked body with the sides of their machetes. At each attack Adel continued to shout, "The blood of Jesus is all-powerful! The blood of Jesus is all-powerful!" Sometimes one of the men would run from behind and swing the flat of his machete blade wildly at the back of her head. She would fall to the ground like a rag doll and cup her head in the palms of her hands. It felt like a thousand needles had been driven into her skull, but when she pulled her hands back, she was astonished to discover she was not bleeding.

Fighting the Hatred Within

Adel's courage increased as she again realized God was miraculously sparing her life. But why? She couldn't comprehend why she was still breathing after so many others had been cruelly murdered. Even her captors had a confused look on their faces, and she wondered if they were also questioning how such a defenseless woman had been able to survive their repeated attacks. They were even more infuriated that she kept calling out about the blood of Jesus.

Finally one of them stopped her, lit a handful of tobacco leaves on fire, and forced them into her mouth. Adel's eyes grew wide as she saw the burning leaves coming toward her. She tried to resist, but there was no way she could overpower his strong arms. Convinced he had finally quieted the "infidel," the man smiled in satisfaction to the others. But after he removed his hands from Adel's mouth, she spat out the smoldering leaves and said confidently, "The blood of Jesus is all-powerful." The seven simple words had become more and more real as Adel's hellish nightmare continued.

The sun set, and the light from a nearly full moon lit their path as they continued on toward Dahma. Adel could see the lights from the homes and the silhouettes of children running and playing. She envisioned her own village and sadly remembered how the children there had played in the evenings just like these children were doing.

The group stopped and Adel was ordered to put her clothes back on. Two young men—they couldn't have been older than twenty—were left with pistols to guard Adel as the others proceeded into the village. Adel asked the two young men if they knew what had happened to her daughter.

"Yeah, we killed her," one of them scoffed.

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Adel sensed they were lying, but she could see the hatred in their eyes. She also felt the hatred arising within herself, and she prayed to God to take it away.

A little while later Adel was taken into the village, where she was again subjected to mockery and torture. The warriors were brutal, but she was strong. If it was her time to die—even at the hands of *jihad* soldiers—she was ready. Once more Adel realized she was the only hostage in sight. She didn't dare imagine how many of the others had been killed. At that moment she didn't know which was worse—to be dead or to be held captive by these vicious madmen. In spite of the torment, she continued to proclaim loudly, “The blood of Jesus is all-powerful” each time a soldier unleashed his terror on her frail body.

At the *jihad* command post, Adel was stripped again. Three women led her into a back room where she was bathed in cold water in a rusted metal tub. “Please let me wash myself,” Adel pleaded. But they refused, and after Adel asked again, the women beat her with large wooden spoons. After the cold bath she was given an old T-shirt and a pair of shorts that were full of holes. Her own clothing belonged to a “filthy pig,” the women told her, and it would be burned.

“Where Are the Christians Hiding?”

Eleven men were assigned to interrogate Adel as another thirty or forty milled around them. She recognized a number of the leaders as men who had come with their banner to her village on September 9 chanting, “Peace to the island of Dodi.” The man who led the interrogation was the same one who had spoken so confidently from the platform that day. Again Adel could feel her hatred growing as she realized that the very people who had come to make a covenant of “peace” had come back to attack her village

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and kill her friends and family, including her precious Anto. Now, as they firmly sat her on a wooden chair in the center of the room, she wondered what their definition of *peace* really was.

“Where are the other Christians hiding?” the tall, lean man calmly asked.

“I cannot tell you. Even if you kill me, I will not answer.” Adel knew where many of them were probably hiding—and also knew what would happen to them if she told.

“Come on. We won’t hurt them. We just want to know where they are. Don’t you want to go home?” Adel sat silent, refusing to answer their questions. The interrogation went on for another thirty minutes, ending with Adel being slapped across the face. A plate of food was placed in front of her, but she refused to eat. Undeterred, two of the men pried her mouth open and began forcing the food in. Adel spat it out, even though she hadn’t eaten anything in three days.

Word of Adel’s refusal to eat or speak traveled quickly through Dahma, and many people gathered outside the command center, crying out, “Hand her over to us! We will cut her into pieces and drive her into the ground!”

Hearing the angry voices, Adel was flooded with hate and fear at the same time. Finally an elderly man known as Saboom Sabar walked into the room. He didn’t appear to be driven by the same rage that had possessed the others. Kneeling down next to where Adel was seated, he asked her if she could tell them where the other Christians were hiding.

“No, I can’t,” she answered as fear won out and the tears began to flow. Sabar got up and said to the commander. “It is better if this child comes with me. If she stays here any longer, she will be killed.”

A group of men continued screaming at Adel and threatening to kill her as she was escorted to Sabar’s home. They promised to

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wait outside for the opportune moment when they could attack her. But Sabar told her, “You will be safe here. You can sleep in my spare room.”

Walking into the sparsely furnished bedroom, Adel quickly closed the door behind her. Then she sat down on the bed—a thatched mat—and let the tears fall as she thought of her beloved family.

“Do You Think He Can Save You from *This*?”

The following day a group of uniformed soldiers entered the village; they were immediately brought to Sabar’s home to meet with Adel. They had the same question as the others: “Where are the other Christians hiding?”

Again Adel refused to answer. She was allowed to return to her room but could hear the men’s conversation through the thin walls. The determined soldiers had only one objective—to find the other Christians—and they had decided that Adel should go with them as their “guide.” Adel was horrified. She committed in her heart that she would die first.

Later that afternoon three of the village wives brought Adel some food, but again she refused to eat. As the women began talking among themselves, Adel realized she had known them previously. They were from another village and were raised Christian. However, they had married Muslim men and had been persuaded to convert. One of the wives, Umi, began maliciously criticizing Adel. “It’s your fault that your son and mother are dead,” she scolded. “You refused to convert to Islam, but now you are experiencing it firsthand. You want to believe in Jesus, but do you think He can save you from *this*?”

“Shut up, Umi! Stop speaking like that,” one of the other women commanded. “What do you think? Do you think

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Mohammed will save *us*?” Adel could see the tenderness in the woman’s eyes, and before she departed Adel reached up and hugged her. The woman started crying and whispered in her ear, “Maybe one day I can return to Christ.”

Adel couldn’t tell if she was making a statement or asking if it was possible. She looked at her sorrowful face and answered softly, “If you really want to return to the Lord, He will make a way.”

As evening approached, the soldiers returned. It had been decided that all the Christians on the island had to be rounded up and that Adel would be the best person to help find them. Once they were gathered, they would all be burned, every one of them. None should be left alive. Adel knew there was nothing she could do to stop their evil plan, so she remained locked in her room and prayed for strength. If they took her as a guide, she knew her refusal to cooperate would mean certain death.

Some men started cheering outside Sabar’s home, and Adel crawled to the outside wall to peek through the cracks so she could see what the commotion was. The warriors had caught another Christian family. The husband had been killed, and the wife and three children were on their way to Dahma. She heard them say the woman’s name was Rose. Adel’s heart sank as she returned to her mat. She knew the family well. One of the children was Anto’s age and had played in their home almost every day.

Nearing midnight, Sabar returned to the room. His face was long. “Adel, what are we to do? The military has demanded that you go with them.”

Adel was amazed that he had said *we*. Sabar almost seemed to identify with her suffering. His kindness offered a little island of comfort in the surrounding hatred. But Adel knew she had no choice. “Tell them they can shoot me right here on the spot. I am not going with them.”

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“Why are you so afraid of them?” Sabar asked.

“Because I know their plans. I overheard them talking, and I will have no part in helping them kill anyone,” she answered.

Sabar left the room. Another sleepless night, and Adel had still refused to eat. In the predawn hours, more reports came in. Another family killed . . . more women and children captured . . . a young girl found. Adel kept wondering if she would hear of Christina, if she had been one of the new captives. Adel thought if they had killed Christina, it might be better. It was an appalling thought, but she dreaded what the vile soldiers would do to her sweet, innocent daughter.

Christina

At four o’clock in the morning, Adel was crying out to God. “Why won’t You let me die?” The tears kept coming, one after the other, steadily rolling down her face as she repeated the plaguing question, “Why?”

The unrelenting threats continued outside her room. One man almost succeeded in stabbing her by pushing his machete through the outside wall into her room. Two of the wives who had visited Adel the previous day also returned, begging her to eat. But she refused. She remained in her room, managing to get a little sleep in the stillness of the morning, but the majority of the time she huddled against the wall and wept. She continued to pray for Methu and her in-laws—but mostly she prayed for Christina.

Then the news came.

“Adel! Adel!” Sabar called as he rushed into her room. “Some men are outside. They say they captured your daughter, Christina.”

It was a risk . . . a big risk, but Adel had to know. Could Christina really be alive? Or was it just a cruel deception to lure

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her away from Sabar's home? There was only one way to find out.

They traveled by boat to the village of Salubi: six *jihad* soldiers, Adel, Sabar (who at Adel's request had agreed to go along), and a young captive named Maksi. Another friend of Anto's, Maksi was only seven. Adel grabbed the young girl and hugged her tightly. She wept as she brushed Maksi's matted hair away from her face. It was a familiar face, a friend of the family.

Adel sat next to Maksi, holding her and caressing her head on the short journey to Salubi. Maksi reminded Adel so much of Anto. But the peaceful moment quickly vanished as Adel saw the armed soldiers waiting on the shoreline. They yanked Adel out of the boat, and their brutal treatment, still fresh in her memory, returned.

Maksi was terrified as she watched the vicious attacks on Adel. She screamed loudly, and her body went into an uncontrollable convulsion. Hearing her young friend's cries, Adel again proclaimed, "The blood of Jesus is all powerful!" She now feared the trip to Salubi had nothing to do with Christina. Hope was quickly fading as the beatings continued. Sabar began yelling at the men, begging them to stop. Managing to free Adel from their grasp, he helped her into a large home just beyond the shoreline, where other captives were being held. Then he told her he had to leave. "There is nothing more I can do for you. If I interfere anymore, they will kill me too. I'm sorry."

There were other women in the house, trembling as the horrid chanting of the men outside continued. Adel had buried her face deep in her hands to weep when she heard footsteps running toward her. Looking up, Adel saw her. It was Christina!

Christina threw herself into her mother's arms and cried, "Mommy, Mommy!" They held each other tight, and Christina continued struggling to get the words out. "I'm so sorry, Mommy ... I'm so sorry. They killed Grandmamma. And I saw his body,

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Mommy, I saw Anto . . . they killed him too. Oh, Mommy!”

“I know, Christina . . . I know they killed them.” The memory was still too much, and Adel began to cry uncontrollably. Christina didn’t know what to say, so she just kissed her mother . . . again and again, she kissed her mother.

Seeking an Answer That Would Not Come

On the evening of the sixth day of her captivity, Adel and sixty other captives were gathered together and told that they had to convert to Islam the following morning.

“I will never become a Muslim,” Adel responded.

“That’s fine. You don’t have to. But if you don’t, if any one of you refuses, we will kill all of you,” the commander countered. “And their blood will be on your head.”

A meeting was convened that evening among the Christian captives. It was the first time they had been allowed to meet as a group since the attacks. They hugged one another, and tears were shed. The Christians knew they had to decide what to do: Would they agree to convert, or would they join the ranks of Christian martyrs? “We can repeat the words; we can say their prayers. God knows our hearts; He will not judge us,” one man finally offered.

“How can we? We have resisted this long. Was it all in vain?”

“What about our children? Are we willing to see them executed before our eyes?”

“Does God want us all to die here in this Muslim village?”

The arguments continued, seemingly fading into the distance as Adel contemplated their dire situation. For herself, she could easily refuse to convert; she knew her faith would carry her through to the end. But was it fair for her actions to determine the fate of the others, including Christina? The dilemma plagued Adel as she cried out to God for an answer. None came.

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The next morning the Christians were assembled in the courtyard. “Have you made your decision? Will you convert—or will you die?” a *jihad* warrior questioned.

No one dared to be the first to answer. Even the younger children refused to speak, frozen in a state of fear and an inner struggle to remain true to their faith. The commander was growing increasingly agitated at their obstinate silence and barked orders to his subordinates in his native language. The soldiers returned with a dozen spoons, and in a bizarre ritual they began mixing mud and forcing the Christians to eat it. The commander slapped Adel across the face when she spat it out. “Eat it! Eat it now!” he shouted at her.

Adel refused.

A hose was then brought out and each of the captives was sprayed in an “Islamic baptism” as the Muslims began chanting verses from the Koran. When they finished, they danced like drunken men and fired their rifles into the air, celebrating their alleged victory of converting the Christians to Islam. The Christians, standing silently together, looked on in confusion as they watched the soldiers continue their futile celebration.

But their hearts dropped when they spotted soldiers carrying cans of gasoline toward the assembled group. A well-dressed, distinguished-looking officer walked ahead of the others. Adel recognized him as a leader from the island of Java. Without an ounce of misgiving, he calmly ordered his officers to lock the Christians in one of the houses and douse it with the gasoline.

Shoved inside a nearby hut, the terrorized Christians began to scream as they huddled around the small children. They were not afraid to die for Christ. Each of them had proved that again and again during their captivity. But the thought of being burned alive, and of watching their little children go up in flames, was too much to endure. In unison they knelt down, crying out to

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God to save them from such a horrific death.

As they were praying, an argument broke out among the soldiers outside. They were debating whether they should burn the Christians. One of them contended that the prisoners had now converted to Islam and could be useful in the *jihad*. Quickly it was agreed. If the captives were willing to participate in the *jihad*, it would confirm their commitment to Allah and result in their being spared.

The Price of Rebellion

Hearing the arguments outside, Adel and the others remained in a state of shock. It was not the answer they were looking for. But a decision would have to be made. If the older captives agreed to go out with the soldiers in the next *jihad*, all would be spared. Otherwise the gasoline would be poured on the hut, and the Christians would be burned. The trembling captives froze on their knees, once more looking at one another for courage and wondering who would dare speak first. The commander stormed into the hut, announcing their good news: “If you are old enough to carry a machete, come join us in the *jihad*. It will be fun!”

The anger in Adel surged as she listened to the sickening mockery of the captives. Feeling a rush of courage, she stood up. The commander smiled, thinking he had his first volunteer. Instead she addressed the others. “Don’t any of you go with them. If they are going to kill us, it is better for them to kill us here. At least we will all be together.”

The commander, infuriated by her defiance, grabbed her by the arm. “What did you say?”

Adel repeated, “We will not be joining the *jihad*. Now please get out.” The commander squeezed Adel’s arm tightly, looking straight into her eyes. He didn’t have to speak; his eyes communi-

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cated his fury perfectly. But Adel believed God would spare them. She also believed her outright rebellion would come with a price. As the commander quickly turned his back and left the room, the others, while admiring Adel's tenacity, wondered if she had just sealed all of their fates.

Miraculously, the soldiers left too, and the captives were taken out of the hut.

Two weeks went by, and Adel was under constant threat. The Muslims knew she had influenced the other prisoners and thought she should be eliminated. Her physical strength was now coming back as she slowly began to eat at the insistence of Christina.

Military leaders were traveling back and forth to the small village almost daily to discuss what should be done with the captives. They doubted the Christians' conversion to Islam was sincere, and they argued that they should have burned them in the hut as previously planned, keeping their village from any further defilement. As a last effort to confirm the conversion of the hostages, they decided all the women should be circumcised.

Some of the women were horrified and began crying hysterically. Their opposition confirmed the suspicions of the village commander, and again he insisted they be executed. Others still thought the Christians would be useful if kept alive, so it was agreed among the Muslims that, for now, they would live. However, they took all the girls who had not reached adolescence, including Christina, and crudely cut them. The pain was excruciating, and Christina cried incessantly. Adel's anger fumed, and she again tried to control the familiar rage boiling inside her. Her own ordeal was difficult beyond imagination, but watching her daughter's suffering was exceedingly worse. Adel felt hatred for every one of the Muslims except Sabar. She knew hatred was a cancer of the soul and that forgiveness would be the

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only antidote. But forgiveness seemed far off, an impossibility. All she could do was pray.

Six weeks went by without another direct threat of execution, but Adel remained deeply troubled. She could see the way the Muslim men looked at her, and a group of them had already tried to rape her. She could sense their lust increasing as the days went on, and she wondered how long she could fend them off. Even the village commander had made inappropriate advances. She longed for Methu's comfort, wondering if he was even alive.

Methu

Unexpectedly one morning a small conclave of government officials came by boat to Salubi. The officials were investigating allegations that Christians were being held hostage in the village, a charge the Muslim soldiers vehemently denied. However, Nahor, the man who owned the boat, was a Christian and had heard that a woman named Adel was being held captive. After dropping off his passengers, he immediately set out looking for her.

"Are you Adel?" Nahor quietly asked after someone pointed her out.

"Who are you?" Adel responded suspiciously. She had barely gotten the words out when Nahor swept her into a hug and started weeping. "I have heard all about you and your situation here," he said.

"What? How do you know me?"

"Methu told me."

Adel couldn't believe her ears. Methu was alive! For the first time in more than six weeks, she felt a surge of joy and actually smiled. "Methu's alive?" she asked, making sure she hadn't heard him wrong.

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“Yes, of course he is. Would you like to write him a letter?” Nahor asked.

The thought of writing Methu quickly went through Adel’s mind. How she longed to make contact with him! But she knew there were more pressing matters. “Yes, I would love to write to Methu. But I have something I must do first. Quickly! Give me a pen and paper.”

Adel sat down and began furiously writing down the names of all the captives. She was still working on the list when she saw the commander approaching. “Quick, take these with you, Nahor. And please be careful!” Adel gave Nahor a quick hug and slipped away, regretting that she hadn’t been able to write to Methu. How she longed to tell him everything . . . how much she loved and missed him . . . how Christina was being so brave. But there just wasn’t enough time, and she was compelled to get out word of the other captives. Unquestionably, their families would be worried too. Now she just hoped nobody had seen her talking with Nahor.

“What were you writing?” The commander was furious when he learned that Adel had not only spoken to the owner of the boat but had also passed him a piece of paper. “Did you send out a letter?”

“No, I didn’t write a letter,” Adel answered.

“What did you write down?” His words came in angry, measured tones as he held a knife to Adel’s neck.

Steadily, Adel told him, “I simply wrote down the names of those you are holding prisoner here.”

“You did what?!” The commander was fuming. Adel thought for sure he was going to plunge the knife into her neck, but for the first time, she was not afraid. She had accomplished what she believed had to be done, and she knew Methu was alive. Today was a good day. A day even the heartless commander couldn’t ruin.

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“I just assured the government officials that no one was being held here against their will. I signed an agreement. Now you give them a list of ‘prisoners’! You pig! You’ll pay for this.”

The commander was true to his word. Adel was brutally beaten that afternoon and many afternoons to follow.

In less than two months the village of Salubi again came under investigation. Adel’s list had been circulated through government offices and among the captives’ families, including Methu. Word now reached Adel that “Methu is coming with government officials to collect you and Christina.”

Adel was ecstatic. She and her daughter had survived a nightmare that had been hellish beyond imagination, and now they were going home. Her spirits were lifted, and she even found herself smiling again. But Christina didn’t seem convinced. “Are we really going home?” she asked skeptically. “Will we get to leave with Daddy? What if they don’t let us go?”

Adel could hear the anxiety in Christina’s voice and knew her questions were valid. She hugged her brave daughter and wondered what ploy their captors might use to prevent their release. The next day she found out.

“I Cannot Go with You”

Adel and Christina were made to stand in front of all the assembled captives. The commander, addressing the Christians, said, “We will soon take Christina and Adel over to Dahma to meet with her Christian husband.” With great anticipation the news of Methu’s coming had already spread among the captives. They knew Adel. If she was allowed to go, she would not rest a moment until all the other captives were released too. Adel would be their lifeline to freedom.

Then the commander continued with a now-familiar threat:

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“Adel and Christina will be asked if they want to remain here with you or leave with Methu. If either one of them chooses to go with Methu, we will kill every one of you.” As the commander walked away, he crouched down in front of a young girl no more than five. Removing his knife from its scabbard, he pressed it against the trembling girl’s throat and maliciously added, “even you.”

The Christians stood and stared at Adel. *How could she make such a decision?* they wondered. And they also pondered what they would do if they were in her shoes. Adel knew that none would blame her or Christina if they chose to go with Methu. But before she could offer any kind of response, the commander said, “Let’s go.”

Now? Adel had no idea Methu was already waiting for them. Everything was happening so fast. She needed time to pray and to consider if the commander would really kill all of them or if it was just a bluff. How could she possibly turn her back on Methu? But how could she make a choice that might mean the death of the other captives?

Before she knew it, she was being led into the room where Methu was seated alongside military officers. As they entered, the commander whispered in Adel’s ear, “Remember: If either of you goes back with him, I’ll kill every prisoner. Not only them, I’ll kill Methu too. I swear, I’ll kill him too.” His icy words sent chills down the back of Adel’s neck, driving out any thought that he might be bluffing.

Adel could see the anguish in Methu’s eyes. How he longed to be back with his wife and daughter! The last three months must have seemed like a lifetime to him, but he was hopeful now. He also was determined, and Adel knew he already would have committed in his heart that he wouldn’t leave the room without them. All she could do was pray for strength.

An officer introduced himself as Mr. Said and without hesitation asked, “Adel, do you want to leave with Methu or remain in

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Salubi?” Adel knew this was going to be the question, word for word. She had been instructed exactly how she was to answer. She tried to speak, but her lips moved soundlessly. Mr. Said repeated the question a little louder. “Adel, do you want to go with Methu or remain in Salubi?”

Adel looked directly at Methu, who was now wondering why she was taking so long to answer. “Methu . . .” Tears rolled down her face as she choked on the words. “I cannot go with you.”

Methu was ready to jump from his chair, to run to Adel and ask her why, but Said held him back, refusing to let him respond. Immediately, Said pressed the same question to Christina. Adel was still crying as she looked at her daughter, unsure how she would answer. She hadn’t had time to confer with Christina and was now convinced they would kill all the captives and Methu, if either of them agreed to go back with Methu. But how could her nine-year-old daughter possibly grasp the severity of agreeing to go with her father?

“I cannot go with you, Daddy. I’m so sorry . . .,” Christina sobbed, desperately trying to apologize to her father and explain the situation.

Mr. Said rudely interrupted, “There. We are finished. We will not have another word about the matter. Understand?”

Adel and Christina were given five minutes with Methu under strict supervision and instructions not to whisper to one another. Ignoring their orders, Adel spoke softly, praying they would not overhear her. “Methu, I had to answer this way. They threatened to kill the others if we go with you. Please don’t hate me. As long as I live I will never give up hope. I know, one day, we will be together again.”

Methu looked at his beautiful wife, seeing the pain in her eyes and even admiring her courage. There was nothing left to say. He just looked at his family and replied simply, “I understand.”

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Clinging to Hope

As quickly as the meeting had started it was over, and Adel and Christina were led from the room. Adel began to turn around to get a final look at Methu, but the commander caught her first, jabbing his fist into her side. “Don’t you look back at him,” he hissed. “He is just a follower of Jesus. He is a pig!” With her hopes shattered, Adel could only wonder what the future now held. All she could do was cry.

For the next few weeks Adel clung to the hope of someday being reunited with Methu. It helped ease the infinite pain of her captivity and gave her something to hold on to, even if it was a distant dream.

Then, on April 10, her dream turned into a nightmare . . .

“Adel,” the commander began, “I have decided what to do with you. You have caused me a lot of grief and are obviously a troublemaker. I have decided to let one of the men marry you. Perhaps he will be able to control you.”

Adel couldn’t believe it. “I can’t marry anyone! I’m already married to Methu!”

“I told you. Methu is not a man. He is a pig, and I do not recognize his marriage to you. If you refuse to marry the man I choose for you, I will let them *all* have you.” The commander accepted no further argument, and Adel knew by the unyielding look on his face that he was serious. There would be no escape.

Adel went to the other women captives and begged them to help her. She knew there was little they could do but hoped they would at least stand with her in protest of the forced marriage. But the others remained silent, fearing for their own lives. Finally one of them told her, “If you don’t marry one of them, they may rape and kill us all.”

Adel was devastated. She had tried so hard to stand with these

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women, and now she felt betrayed. She began to sob, “How can you turn me into some kind of commodity and sell me off just to save yourselves?”

The others could only apologize as they clung together and wept. They knew it would not be the last time one of them would be forced to marry.

When she and Christina were forced to move in with Almin, her new husband, Adel believed the situation couldn’t get any worse. But the situation *did* get worse. A few months later, Adel became pregnant.

A New Life

By October Adel’s emotional state had come crashing down. She felt as if she were uncontrollably spiraling downward through an endless pit. These monsters had killed her son and mother, and they had beaten her mercilessly more times than she could count. Now she believed they had even taken away her hope of being reunited with Methu. The hatred that had begun that horrible day she was captured was growing faster than the new life inside her. She cried as she searched for hope but found none. She couldn’t even love the innocent baby in her womb. To Adel, it was just a reminder of all they had taken from her.

“I won’t let them take any more,” she decided.

She waited until she was alone. Then she took the knife off the kitchen counter. It was hard to believe things had progressed this far. Adel questioned why she had been spared only to experience such despair. She knew God had saved her, but she no longer felt she could live. Slowly putting the knife to her womb, she closed her eyes and prayed God would forgive her.

“Mom, stop!” Christina yelled as she came running into the room and grabbed the knife from her mother’s grasp. Adel burst

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into tears and crumpled to the floor. Christina was now crying alongside her mother. “Mom, what are you doing? You can’t do this to yourself. And this baby has done nothing wrong. It is innocent.”

Adel was broken. For hours she cried as Christina’s words echoed through her heart and soul. She begged God to forgive her as she confessed her hatred for those who held her hostage. She began to realize how her rage had nearly destroyed an innocent life, just as the *jihad* warriors had done to her. It was a sobering reality, and although she didn’t feel immediate forgiveness for those who had hurt her, she knew she had to be willing to let God’s grace work. Her hatred had blocked the healing power of God’s love that she now began to experience.

Adel began caressing her womb and speaking to the young life inside her. Believing it was a girl, she named the baby Sarah. “Sarah, please forgive me. Please forgive the sins of your mother. You have done nothing wrong. You are the good that can come from such a bad situation. I love you.”

A dark cloud seemed to lift as she continued to pray and speak to Sarah. Previously Adel had considered the unborn baby another enemy, the child of her own son’s killer. Now she realized it was *her* baby and one of God’s creations. An instant bond formed as she hugged both of her daughters.

The next day Adel grabbed a sheet of paper, knowing she had to communicate with Methu. She had to tell him all that had happened and beg his forgiveness. Even if he didn’t consider her his wife any longer, she understood, and she would not hold anything against him. She loved him and longed for their reunion. As she wrote, her tears mixed with the ink, making a mess of the letter. She wondered if he would even be able to read it. By the time she finished she had written six pages. For Adel, it was the most painful and important love letter she had ever

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written. She carefully folded it up and hid it away, praying for an opportunity to get it to Methu.

On December 24, all the captives were forced to work in the coconut plantation. It was difficult work, especially for Adel, who was now six months pregnant. But the prisoners also realized it was the day before Christmas, and each savored past holiday memories. That evening when Adel started to softly hum the tune of “Silent Night,” the others joined in. Soon they all began singing the lyrics as the stern-faced guards listened suspiciously. Each one knew the dangers in singing the traditional Christmas song about Christ. They would probably be beaten, but no one seemed to care. The joy of singing would be worth the punishment.

Late into the evening they sang and reminisced about their families. Their bodies remained captive, but their souls were set free as they continued to sing into the heavens. The next morning they cried tears of sorrow and joy, mourning their imprisonment but looking forward to happier times. They would never forget the Christmas they spent together in the fields.

On March 18 Sarah was born.

Now that the baby had come, Christina felt it was time to tell her mother, “You must try to escape, just you and Sarah. You must leave. If you don’t leave, we will all die here.”

“I can’t leave you, Christina. I will never leave you,” Adel assured her daughter.

“Mom, listen to me. You *have* to leave,” the tenacious ten-year-old pleaded. “Almin will never let us all leave together. But if you and Sarah go, he will think you will surely come back. But you can’t. You must get to Daddy. He will come back for me. It is our only hope.”

Adel knew her daughter was right, but she didn’t know how she could possibly implement such an idea. She didn’t know if Methu would even take her back. And now there was Sarah. Adel

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simply didn't have the courage to plan their escape with so many questions still lingering.

Then, in April, her answer came. Adel had been carrying the letter to Methu for over six months, hoping and praying for an opportunity to send it out. One afternoon, as some children were visiting their village, the occasion came. Adel knew one of the children and quietly made her way to where they were playing. She quickly passed the letter to the one she knew and asked her to make sure it got to her husband Methu. The child simply took the letter and nodded in agreement.

Adel walked back home, praying the letter would reach Methu . . . praying he would forgive her . . . praying he still loved her. And each day Adel peered across the village, anxiously waiting for the child to come back for a visit. A few days later her wait was over.

"Did you see Methu? Did you give him my letter?" she promptly questioned the child she had given the letter to.

"Yes, I did give it to Methu. And at the same time I handed it to him, he handed me this."

Adel was astonished when the girl handed her the letter. Methu had written to her before he had even received her letter. She could tell by the discolored envelope and its frayed edges that he had carried it for a while, just as she had carried the letter she'd written to him.

She considered reading it on the spot but quickly changed her mind. What if Methu hated her? What if he had married another woman? Adel's emotions were on a roller coaster as she ran back to her home, tearing open the letter. Her heart skipped a beat as her eyes fell on the words.

Adel, you could have ten children by ten men, and you would still be my wife. Don't you remember what

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the pastor told you? Only God can separate us now. I love you.

Methu

Adel had her answer. She would plan her escape.

Escape and Rescue

Barely two months later, on June 18, Almin gave his permission for Adel to visit some relatives on a neighboring island. Holding Sarah tightly, Adel reached for Christina as she proceeded to board the small ferryboat. But Almin pulled Christina back. “She’s staying here.”

Adel begged Almin to let Christina go, but he refused. “I’m not going without Christina,” she insisted. But Almin wouldn’t budge. He knew his wife would run if Christina went along.

But it was just as Christina had planned. She hugged her mother and whispered in her ear, “Please, Mom! Please promise me you and Sarah will go to Daddy. Please, I’m begging you. I’ll be OK.” Adel held Christina tighter, wondering how she could ever leave her alone. But Christina’s plea seemed to cut directly into her heart. Wondering how her daughter could be so brave, Adel kissed her and said good-bye. She knew it might be the last time she saw her for a while. Or maybe forever.

Adel stood against the boat’s railing, slowly watching Christina fade into the distance. She hugged Sarah and began to cry once more as she asked herself again if she was making the right decision. She had no intention of visiting her distant relatives. She would quickly make her way to Methu before Almin realized she had escaped. Then, somehow, they had to get Christina back.

It took Adel a week to reach the place where Methu was staying.

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The journey had been long and difficult, and Adel had avoided making contact with Methu up to this point, fearing Almin would find out what she was up to. She sat on a bed, quietly holding Sarah in the back room of the guesthouse, anxiously waiting. *Will Methu really want me?* she kept asking herself. *And what about Sarah?*

Even though Adel was now free, she still felt captive. Worse, she felt like a traitor. She had married another man and left her daughter Christina behind. How could Methu ever forgive her? Over and over she questioned her decisions as she cried herself to sleep.

Adel awoke abruptly to the sounds of Methu entering the house. She sat up in the bed, trembling; then she grabbed Sarah, who was still sleeping, and stood up. Suddenly convinced she had made a terrible mistake, Adel gave in to an urge to run from the house. She didn't think about where she would go; she would just run. She couldn't face Methu.

But before she could get to the door, Methu walked in. Without pausing even an instant, he crossed the room and swept up his wife in a joyful embrace. Then he looked down at the baby girl Adel held in her arms, and he smiled. "So this is our new daughter," he said. Adel cried—happy tears now—cherishing their long-awaited reunion. Adel wanted to hold on to Methu forever, to relish the security of his strong arms around her. But she knew Methu had to leave. She knew he wouldn't rest until he had rescued Christina.

Adel nervously waited day after day, not hearing a word from Methu or Christina. *What if they have already killed Christina? What if Methu is dead? Is it all my fault?* She tried to fight the agonizing questions relentlessly pounding through her mind by crying out to God for reassurance.

Adel found comfort in the familiar passages of Scripture she

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had desperately missed during her eighteen months of captivity. She remembered how the *jihad* soldiers had hacked her Bible to pieces in the jungle. Adel turned again to Philippians 4:13 and as was her habit, she read the words aloud: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” She remembered the last time she had read these words. It was on the hill behind her village the very day of the attack. A lifetime had passed since then, and she had traveled to hell and back. She knew her nightmare was far from over, and she couldn’t stop thinking of Christina, wondering if she had betrayed her own daughter.

Methu had been gone more than two weeks before Adel finally got word that he was with Christina and she should come join them at once. They would finally be reunited, a family again. Tears of joy rolled down her face as she thanked God that Methu was able to rescue Christina. But now she wondered . . . how far would Almin go to get them back?

Epilogue

When we interviewed Adel, she and Methu were studying in a secret Bible school, learning to be evangelists. Even though several months had passed since she escaped, Adel and her family continued to be constantly on the run to elude Almin, who, with the help of many Muslims he had enlisted, continued to hunt them down. On at least two occasions, Adel was nearly captured.

Adel had to deal with two significant issues upon her release. The first was something that, initially, she thought she could never do. As a Christian, she knew she had to forgive the *jihad* soldiers. The difficult process had actually begun with her pregnancy, when Christina reminded her that the baby growing inside her had done nothing wrong, that baby Sarah was innocent. Adel knew she could say the words “I forgive,” but they

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also needed to penetrate her heart, where real forgiveness takes place. During the months following her escape, Adel spent much time in prayer. She prayed for the salvation of those who had hurt her and her family. She believed this prayer was a key to being able to forgive them in her heart.

The second issue was equally challenging. Adel had to forgive herself. Because of her forced marriage to Almin, she often thought of herself as a traitor. Unfortunately, other Christians confirmed this self-accusation, and the idea continually plagued her soul, bringing her much anxiety, especially during her escape. At times she believed that Methu and other Christian friends would “put her out” because of her forced marriage. At times this inner turmoil was more difficult to handle than the physical abuse she had endured.

When Adel came out of captivity, she was debriefed by a Christian missionary couple who had befriended Methu and had worked both nationally and internationally to help her cause. When Adel approached the husband, the Lord spoke to his spirit, and the very first words that came out of his mouth were, “Adel, you are *not* a traitor.”

Hearing his words, Adel broke down and wept, and on that day, she began to forgive herself.

Adel and Methu have continued to work to secure the release of those who were held captive with her. It continually weighs on her heart that some of the individuals mentioned in these pages are still held captive today.

She asks for our prayers.