



THE GIFTED

By Terri Blackstock

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Chapter One

“This just isn’t working.” Bree Harris closed her Bible and pinned Andy Hendrix and Carl Dennis with an accusing stare. “I thought you said this Bible Study was going to be an outreach, that we were going to talk it up and get half the office studying with us every Thursday. That was the plan, wasn’t it?”

“I thought you said you were going to be the one to print out the fliers, telling people about it.” Carl Dennis got up and crossed the employees’ lounge. The office coffee pot was filled to capacity, even though there were only three of them here. He poured himself a cup. “Where are those brochures? I never saw them.”

“I was busy, okay? I didn’t have time. You could have done them, you know.”

Andy sat slumped at the table, his Bible open in front of him. “Bree, you’re supposed to be the big desktop publishing whiz. When we talked about this at church, you said it would be easy. You were even excited about it.”

“I know.” Bree sat back in her chair. “I blew it, okay? I should have done it, but I didn’t.”

“It’s okay.” Andy got up and joined Carl at the coffee. “We don’t have to have a bunch of people in this. We can do it with just us.”

The two men made an amusing picture standing side by side. Andy was six feet four and three hundred pounds; Carl was only five-five and probably weighed a hundred-thirty pounds soaking wet. But their personalities didn’t match their stature. Carl said whatever came to his mind--good or bad--as if he didn’t realize that almost anyone in the office could pin him to the floor in the time it took to call him a jerk. Andy, on the other hand, though he looked a lot like one of those cocky television wrestlers who ranted and raved threats, was mild-mannered and quiet.

“I know we can do it with just us,” Bree said, “buthaving the Bible study¹ was supposed to be for a purpose. A way to share Christ with our coworkers. I just don’t get it. Half the people up here claim to be Christians, but when we start a once-a-week Bible study for thirty stinking minutes after work, nobody has time for it. It kind of makes me mad, you know? I mean, what are the unbelievers supposed to think?”

“Like I said,” Carl piped in, “they’re not going to think anything because they weren’t even aware we were having it.”

Bree bristled. “Hey, I did put it in last week’s newsletter. I also sent an E-mail around to everybody.”

Carl sipped his coffee. “Nobody reads those things. I get a million E-mails a day. I delete half of them.”

“I also invited a lot of people² personally. That should have carried more weight than anything else.”

“I did, too.” Carl sat back down³. “I told everybody I’ve seen for the last three days, and I heard excuses that would make your head spin.”

“Well, we’re here.” Andy came back to the table and set his coffee down. “We can do this. I’ve been working on my lesson all week.”

To Bree, that was the biggest problem. When the idea had come up to start this Bible study where they worked, Andy had quickly volunteered to teach it. In her opinion, he was the worst choice. His soft, level monotone would probably put them right to sleep. It was clear that he was following their pastor’s admonition to step out of his comfort zone, but she wished they didn’t all have to pay for his growth.

She just didn’t have the heart to say so. “Okay, Andy. You’ve got the floor.”

Carl came and sat down, but the look on his face said that his thoughts mirrored Bree’s.

Andy cleared his throat twice, sipped his coffee, then pulled his notes out of his Bible.

“Maybe we could open with a prayer?”

Bree glanced at Carl. “All right.”

¹ What it? What was supposed to be for a purpose?

² So it doesn’t refer back to the emails.

³ How about a beat here rather than Carl said?

Andy took both of their hands and bowed his head.

A rumbling sounded over the building, and the coffee in Carl's cup began to slosh. The framed "Character First" sign hanging on the wall crashed to the floor.

Andy's grip on their hands tightened slightly. "It's just a tremor."

But it was more than a tremor. Other pictures fell, and the chairs they sat in began to vibrate and move beneath them. The coffee pot jerked its way across the counter and crashed onto the floor.

"Earthquake!" Carl jumped up⁴. "Get into a doorway!"

"Not a doorway," Bree cried. "We'll never make it. Get under the table!"

The three of them dove under the table as the rumbling grew louder. The floor began to crumble, and Bree had the terrifying sensation of hunkering over unsupported plaster that was falling apart beneath her. She screamed⁵.

Plaster from the ceiling began to snow down on them. "The ceiling!" she cried. "We have to get out."

She couldn't hold back the scream that rose in her throat.

She tried to crawl toward the door, but Andy pulled her back. "The wall's coming down! Cover yourself!"

She got back under the table and covered her head as the wall collapsed on itself, making the rest of the room slant and splinter like a house made of toothpicks. The floor beneath them tilted to one side, rumbling like waves, and the table started to slide.

Bree shrieked out her horror⁶ as she began to slide down the incline of the floor. The three-story building above them came down in slow motion, walls crashing, the ceiling caving, people yelling above them.

The light blacked out, and all went dark, but the rumbling didn't stop. The building continued falling on top of them, burying them alive.

⁴ Beat instead of shout? Have him jump up? Push his chair back?

⁵ Again, rather than telling here, how about something like

⁶ Nice!