

Choices of the Least

Sonya glided between the tiny mud huts of her little village, hoping the fading darkness of the night would hide her. She had just gotten home from her church service when she had seen the KGB trucks rumbling down the road. She realized that their secret congregation had been exposed. Sonya prayed that she would be able to warn her tiny church in time. But when Sonya was only a couple yards away, the trucks came to a surprisingly quiet halt as the police jumped out their trucks and ran up next to the house where the small congregation was meeting. Their dark Soviet uniforms blended in with the dimming night. On the chief's signal, they burst through the tiny door of the hut where the secret church was gathered. Sonya heard the women cry out as the KGB shouted, "Up, on your feet! Against the wall, you cockroaches." Sonya's stomach turned as she thought about how terrified her Christian brothers and sisters were. Soon, her screwed up her courage and crept slowly up to the hut to listen to what would happen.

Chief Officer Dmitriy Nikolaevich Andropov glared at the Christians with a haughty look. With disdain in his voice, Dmitriy expressed, "It seems that the laws of our great leader Joseph Stalin haven't reached your pathetic village. Well, let me enlighten you. No one is allowed to hold any meetings unless it is sanctioned by the government. Religious meetings are the worst. I could haul you all off to a labor camp, but I'm feeling merciful. If any of you will deny your 'God,' then I'll let you go free. Otherwise, the consequences will be most severe. So, who's first?"

The silence in the room frustrated Dmitry. These people weren't giving him the satisfaction of cowering or begging for mercy. They were strong. Too strong to keep alive very long. He turned his back to the Christians and coolly said, "So, you wish to hold on to your

precious myth of God? Very well. Captain, we will march these people to the nearby woods and execute them immediately. We can't allow vermin like these to live."

The KGB officers immediately started yelling at the prisoners to get moving, and the door of the tiny hut swung open. Sonya hid in the shadows as tears streamed down her face. She prayed for her brothers and sisters, but no one was able to hear her above the cursing of the police officers as they marched Sonya's friends to certain death. When they were out of sight, Sonya crept out of the shadows and into the pink glow of the dawn. Even though her head was spinning from what had just happened, one question continually reprised itself in her mind: What do I do, she wondered.

Sonya knew what she couldn't do. She couldn't go after her friends. That would be insane! Maybe she was saved for a reason. Why should she run off and get shot by the police for what she believed? She loved her Savior, but life was also precious. She shouldn't just throw it away. She just couldn't.

Then, Sonya remembered what they had read in church that night. She pulled out her own precious copy of the Bible, and opened it to Matthew 16:24-25. She picked a sweet smelling purple flower that lay beside her and placed the blossom opposite the Scripture that read, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.'"

The last verse repeated itself in her mind over and over. Should she really lose her earthly life to find the life that only Christ can give? Her objections slowly melted away as she realized, "To live for the God I love, I have to follow Him always, whether I live or die. His love is enough to take care of me, no matter what, and I have the promise of a greater life in him." As

tears rained down her cheeks, Sonya lifted her eyes up to Heaven and whispered, “Dear Heavenly Father, I’m sorry for trying to hold on to this earthly life rather than clinging to you. I know now what I have to do. Please give me the strength to not deny your name. Let your will be done. I love you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.” With peace filling her heart, Sonya quickly wiped away her tears and sprinted along the church’s trail that led into the towering forest.

As she entered the woods, Sonya could see her friends. She didn’t know if she was going to join them lined up against the small cliff with police rifles pointed at them, but she didn’t have time to think about it anymore because the KGB had spotted her. Officer Andropov bellowed, “Stop! Stay where you are!”

Sonya came to a halt, panting for breath. Dmitriy marched up to her and said, “What do you want? Do you want to join those vermin over there?” Her heart pounding in her throat, Sonya gasped, “I will join them if I must. I am a Christian just like them.”

Dmitriy’s eyes flared with hate as he grabbed the collar of her dress and held her right below his face. She could sense his disgust as he sneered, “Are you a Christian?” Although Dmitriy wore his hate openly, Sonya saw past that. She saw a man who didn’t see the way of love that she had embraced. Her heart overflowed with compassion for him.

Angered by her silence, Officer Andropov screamed, “Answer me!” Sonya looked at him, and with eyes full of love for him and her Savior, softly answered, “Yes.”

Officer Dmitriy Nikolaevich Andropov’s eyes flashed with rage as he shoved Sonya to her knees and pulled out his pistol. This will end now, he thought. He pointed his gun to the kneeling target, and pulled the trigger. The men gasped and the women wept as Sonya’s body crumpled to the ground. Officer Andropov turned to his men and ordered, “Shoot the rest of them. Fire!” The air exploded as the bullets pierced the bodies of the congregation.

Sonya lay on the forest floor, gasping with her final breaths. She had made her choice, and had found the strength to succeed. She turned her eyes to the sky and whispered, "Thank you." And as her eyes found darkness, her soul found light.

After his men had buried the bodies, Dmitry strangely felt drawn to the place of execution. His mind kept going back to the strange girl that ran up to them, claiming to be a Christian. He kept thinking about her eyes. They were so full of love and peace when he shot her. It was so strange. He loathed Christians like her. Yet he wanted what she had.

In the midst of the blood that was splattered across the forest floor, he found something interesting. A little book. He opened it and flipped through the pages. He landed on a page that had a little purple flower pressed in it. Glancing through the lines, a short passage caught his eye. It read, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.'" Maybe this is what that girl and those other Christians believed. But who was this God they loved so much that they'd give their lives for him? Deciding to consider it further, Officer Dmitriy Nickolaevich Andropov tucked the little book into his coat and walked into the open field as the sun was rising.