

Unthinkable

Helen Preston's psychological and emotional stability had always been a little borderline. In that respect she was not different from many people who, in a reasonably normal environment, are perfectly functional. In fact, Helen had functioned rather well in Tycho City until that day.

Born Helen Katheryn Williams, Helen was among one of the first fifty children to be born on the moon and she was the apple of her mother's eye. Still, growing up on the moon was anything but a normal environment. There were a lot of dangers in those early days and Helen's parents did their best to protect their daughter. Part of this protection was teaching her to be very compliant and unquestioning about many rules regarding the way they lived. After all, ignoring some of these rules would get you killed instantly. However, in their zeal they managed to instill many phobias in little Helen and predisposed her to be highly codependent in her behavior. She was always striving to please her parents and gain their approval while conforming to their every demand. Even though this was not completely healthy, her tendency toward codependence served her well in school.

Helen was an excellent student and the teachers always enjoyed having her in their class. She was always so eager to please and never talked back or questioned their authority to demand anything of her. Steven Preston noticed this about Helen and was intrigued by it. Ultimately they began to date and eventually fell in love and were married. Helen's three children became part of the second generation to be born on the moon, and now Tycho City was a thriving metropolis.

Along with being a metropolis, Tycho City had its problems as well. It had all the unpleasant trappings of any modern city, and this included an abusive religious group. Of course it portrayed itself as the one true religion, but when have groups such as these not done that? For Helen and Steven the Brotherhood of the Star became an important facet of their everyday lives.

The Brotherhood was a very authoritarian group that attracted converts in the usual way. They appealed to people wanting to be committed to something noble and important while providing a sense of belonging and the pride of being one of the chosen few. True to form, the Brotherhood was lead by a charismatic force to be reckoned with, Ted Jamison. Ted was the prime mover behind everything about the Brotherhood. He determined exactly how the membership was organized, and established in clear terms a hierarchy of reporting and accountability that would have made any military commander envious. All of this resulted in Helen being in anything but a normal environment.

People often thought of Helen as being a good mom, but internally she always doubted her own capability as a mother. Her self-esteem was very low and much of what drove her to be "super-mom" was really co-dependency. She was always trying to compensate for what she believed was a lack within her. Yet, in spite of her marginal self-image, she managed to put on a pretty good front and few noticed any problems.

In the Brotherhood there was a heavy emphasis on performance, all failings are ultimately sin and salvation always hung in the balance. This was combined with pseudo-counseling within the group that portrayed itself as a valid therapeutic approach in spite of the fact that none of the supposed "counselors" within the Brotherhood had any training whatsoever in counseling or therapy of any kind.

Over a period of time Helen became increasingly discouraged regarding her ability to "live up to" the standards of the Brotherhood. She saw repeatedly that no matter how hard she

tried she was always falling short of the performance standards of the group. She couldn't seem to pray enough, give enough, invite enough, convert enough, or even raise her kids well enough to meet the expectations of those she saw as being in authority over her.

Helen wanted to turn to her husband for support but the communication was strained. She knew anything she might say to him about her dilemma would be passed on to others. She also knew the harshness that she could expect when it was pointed out to her yet again that her problem was just sin in her heart and how she just needed to work harder and be more open. She knew that her past openness had only added to her burden and had never lightened it.

Still, despite depression and anguish over her situation, she had been firmly convinced that the doctrine of the group was sound. She had never been able to point out to anyone the things she thought were wrong without them pointing out that she was just being prideful, unteachable, and stiff necked. She was sure they must be right because, after all, they were good Brothers and clearly she had not been good at this.

Helen believed the Brotherhood doctrine that said her young children, were "saved" because they had not reached the age-of-accountability. She wished she wasn't accountable either because she felt she was losing her ability to hang on any longer. Each day became harder and harder with no relief in sight. Yet she believed that if she didn't persevere that her kids would not be saved when they were older. What chance would they have if their mom were lost? How could she raise them to be good Brothers if she wasn't being a good Brother herself?

Ultimately Helen felt herself slipping over the edge. She was yet again facing something where she would be branded as a sinner and become in danger of losing her salvation. She was having angry thoughts against the founder of the Brotherhood of the Star, Ted Jamison.

More and more it felt as if Ted was accusing her at every turn and the stabbing pain of those accusations had been eating away at Helen for a very long time. She desperately wanted to be exemplary as a member of the Brotherhood yet constantly was falling short. She tried to spend an hour in prayer each morning, but too often she would nod off after about thirty or forty minutes. Then she would awake with a start hearing Ted's shouting in her head about those who couldn't be faithful in the little things never being trusted with anything greater. She tried to invite people she met to attend meetings of the Brotherhood so that they might become members, but often her low self-esteem held her back. She knew that people were not attracted by her mousy invitations and she sometimes heard people talk about her behind her back afterward. Often she would shrink back from inviting people only to hear Ted's voice screaming inside her head about those who "shrink back and are lost forever!" Helen worked hard at raising her children to be exemplary as well, but sometimes even this did not go well.

Just a week earlier Tommy had gotten in a fight at school. Of course her mentor, Evelyn, found out about it and spent an hour berating her about how badly she was doing as a mother. As bad as the things Evelyn was saying were, Helen scarcely heard her over the screaming of Ted in her head. She heard him screaming about those who couldn't properly raise their own families being worse than pagans and dooming themselves and their children to the fires of hell.

In all of this her husband, Tom, always managed to make matters even worse by quoting Ted to her. Anytime Ted wasn't shouting in her head, Tom was right there to be the substitute for their almost-omnipresent leader. Tom liked the power and control he was able to exert as one of the leadership within the Brotherhood. Helen was sure it angered him greatly when her failings kept him from rising higher in the organization, and this no doubt prompted some of his tirades. Then, if his berating of Helen wasn't enough, he always remembered to pass along Helen's failings to Evelyn for additional follow-up.

The anger grew in Helen daily. She began to imagine killing Ted in a variety of ways. Once she imagined re-programming the Jamison family's robotic domestic to kill Ted. Another time she envisioned causing one of the Lunar communication satellites to fail, crashing into the Jamison quarters when Ted was there. Sometimes she was even more imaginative and prayed for a meteor strike. Yet, while Ted had become the focus of her anger, Helen could not shake her belief that what he was saying was true. She was a failure; a failure at everything. She was certain that the only thing she might ever succeed at was going to Hell.

In a strange way Helen's imagination was the only thing that kept her on the edge of sanity. As long as she could picture fighting back, she didn't feel completely helpless, but finally even her imagination had begun to fail her. She wanted Ted to die, but she found it difficult to muster the energy to imagine killing him. After all, even if he were dead she expected she would still continue hearing his screaming voice in her head. She felt as if she were already living in her own private version of Hell.

Helen wanted to fight through this, but there was no strength to draw on. She had depended on the Brotherhood and her husband for years and all they had provided was accusation and condemnation. But as much as they had accused her, this was nothing compared to what she had done to herself through internalizing the teachings of the group. She hated herself and was convinced of her ultimate destination after death. She just accepted that this is the way it must be for her.

Helen was terrified. While she was willing to accept judgment upon herself, she couldn't bear to pass the judgment of Hell on to her young innocent children. No matter what, she loved them more than her own life and would have done anything to save them, but she knew she was incapable of hanging on any longer. What could she do? She saw only one way.

Saturday was a day the three kids had been looking forward to for some time. Steven had to work, but Helen was going to take the three on an excursion beyond the city in one of the rovers that they could use for family excursions. The rovers were two-part vehicles consisting of a cab and a trailer. The cab, where the driver sat was an independent unit that towed the trailer and would normally allow families privacy from hired drivers. However, in this case Helen would be driving as she was certified to do. This would allow the kids to have free run of the trailer and this greatly heightened their excitement about the trip.

The excursion was to be outside of the main area of the Tycho crater where they could get a good look at the city from the outside. This promised to be quite a sight since the terminator would be crossing the crater during their trip.

During the drive outside of the city Helen had the intercom turned on so that she could hear the kids in the trailer. They were having a great time. Under the circumstances she couldn't bear to tell them to settle down. She just listened as they got farther and farther from the city limits. As she drove, Helen was alone with her thoughts and considered what it would be like. She swung the rover around so that they could all have a view of the city. The kids were going wild. Helen's hand paused over the trailer "Vent" switch.

She did the unthinkable, believing it was her children's only hope. The sound of the children disappeared. There is no sound in a vacuum. Then she sat waiting for the Tycho City Police as the trailer alarm beacon did its job.