

# In The Heart of Darkness

By Cindy White

From beneath her warm covers, Debra could feel the weight of nightfall. Somehow she could sense the subtle difference between night and day from inside her shadowy prison. Debra had lost track of how long she'd been in this state of darkness — weeks maybe — or perhaps just days. She wasn't sure.

Apart from brief interruptions to the stillness by a solemn visitor, Debra knew only solitude. The terror she felt in the beginning vacillated now between depression and despair.

Debra was desperate for someone to explain all this to her, tell her that there was hope. But nobody came. Just the quiet-someone that brought the bland food twice a day and scooped it into her flaccid mouth.

If only she knew where she was. Why didn't someone come for her? Why didn't someone tell her what was happening? Tears escaped down her cheeks, but she was unable to will her hands to wipe them away.

*Jesus, where am I? Where are you? Please find me. I'm here!* The prayer screamed out from her, but no sound was to be heard.

Debra woke to the soft patter of feet. It must be morning, she thought, judging from the faint lightness in the room and the hunger in her stomach. Tender hands rolled Debra gently from side to side, washing her limp body with a damp cloth. She wasn't surprised by the act as she had been the first time. Then she had only just woken in this strange state of unknowing and her caretaker hadn't yet gained her trust. The scent of soap lifted her mood ever so slightly.

After a breakfast of sweet mush, the footsteps receded. *Please don't leave! Please stay with me!* But the words produced only silence and Debra found herself alone once more.

*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*

The message entered her heart as if it had entered her ears. Debra had faith — she remembered that much. She had spent her life serving the Lord and trusted Him. His words brought comfort and eased her despair. He would not abandon her in this place.

Though she was lost, she was not lost to Him.

Her thoughts were lucid, but confusion swirled around her circumstances. Why she was unable to see, or speak, or move her limbs, was a mystery. Why no one spoke to her was unimaginable.

In her mind's eye she saw flashes of bright colors and faces she couldn't identify. Brown faces, colorful baskets — and voices... What had happened?

Debra recalled a recent mission trip. She'd gone into a remote village near Haiti to bring hope and aid to the orphans and widows. An orphan and widow herself, she was devoted to sharing God's message of love and hope where it was so desperately needed.

She didn't remember going home from this mission. Perhaps...she hadn't.

Suddenly — a voice! Praise God! Such a sweet sound. Her heart raced as two sets of footsteps moved closer.

"Miss Debra?" The voice said softly. Debra wanted to see her, to say, "Yes, that's me!" but she only managed to open her mouth.

"Miss Debra, I'm Tara from the Red Cross. We got word that you'd gone missing and we've been looking for you." A hand touched her shoulder. "If you can understand me, blink your eyes."

Debra squeezed her eyes with all her might.

Tara took Debra's hand in hers. "Apparently you collapsed in the marketplace. You've been in the home of a widow named Lydia. She's deaf and mute. She couldn't communicate with you, or with us, but it looks like she's taken very good care of you."

As understanding took hold, Debra's heart was filled with gratitude and compassion for this poor widow who had been so dedicated to her care. It all began to make sense.

After a short examination, Tara said, "I'm not a doctor, but it appears as though you may have suffered a stroke. We'll be moving you to a hospital today. The trip may be a little rough, but they'll take good care of you until you can be flown home."

Tears of relief poured down Debra's face. At last she had the answers. How fortunate she was to be alive. How she ached to embrace her caretaker, the kind stranger who so tenderly cared for her in her darkest hours.

She may never be able to repay such kindness. But even so, Debra trusted that somehow God would.