

An excerpt from:

# *BRUSHWORK*

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Malcolm Brendel had always known he was special, but he didn't realize how special until he rose from the dead at the age of thirty-three.

It happened during a Lamb of God Revival meeting in southwestern Kansas, a gently rolling country of stone houses and solid people. The dense, saturated heat of the day had not dissipated when darkness fell, and lightning crackled in the humid air, threatening a downpour that never materialized.

It was the end of the third day of the revival, the day Reverend Brendel had designated as "Red, White, and Blue God and Country Day," where testimonies of personal salvation alternated with ringing endorsements of America's ever deepening struggle with Godless communism in Vietnam. Prominent Kansas Republicans alternated with noted preachers in a round robin of speeches and sermons that was about to culminate in the appearance of Malcolm Brendel for the nightly baptism of the saved. People had come from as far away as northern Oklahoma and eastern Colorado for the event.

As he descended from the bus that served as his road headquarters, one which he believed was the only retired school bus in the state of Kansas with its own safe, the Reverend Brendel took a last drag from his unfiltered Pall Mall and crushed the butt into the sandy soil under his foot. Adjusting the collar of his sky-blue robe, he headed for the tent, passing between poles supporting a banner proclaiming the three-day revival. Two ushers at the entrance greeted him respectfully.

Reverend Brendel entered between two folding literature tables filled with Bibles, devotional books, and recordings. The capacity crowd immediately sensed his presence and rose from their folding chairs, some saying, "Praise the Lord," others, "Thank you, Jesus." Brendel nodded graciously in acknowledgment. When he reached the low platform at the center of the tent, he turned and stretched out his hands to the crowd, which fell silent. Removing the microphone from its stand, he placed it against his lips, and said in a near whisper that was heard perfectly at every seat, "Know that you are not here to be saved. You are here because you *are* saved. God himself has said this, and I say it to you again." There was a restrained cheer and a chorus of "Amen."

Next to the platform stood a galvanized steel cattle trough full of water. It had seen heavy service during the previous two nights of the revival and the soil around it was muddy. Two attendants stood behind it to assist people emerging from the trough and present them with towels. Reverend Brendel concluded his remarks and signaled for the first candidate to come forward. She was a woman in her early twenties, short and thickly

built, wearing a pair of dark blue slacks and a white cotton sleeveless blouse. One of the attendants assisted her into the trough, and she stood with her hands folded while Brendel stepped down from the platform and stood next to her.

“Karen,” he said, finding her name at the top of the list before him, his rich pastoral voice reverberating with great solidity throughout the tent, “do you confess that you have turned away from sin and have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your lord and savior?” He shifted the microphone toward her.

“I do.” Karen closed her eyes in near ecstasy as she said this.

“And do you then promise, as you depend upon the grace of God, to faithfully serve Christ within the fellowship of his Church for the remainder of your days on earth?”

“I do.”

“So be it then, Karen, that upon your profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Her knees trembling, Karen had already sunk into the trough, and as he finished his words, with his left hand Malcolm Brendel firmly thrust her head backward under the cold water. One of the attendants stood ready to drape a towel over her so that her chilled erect nipples did not catch the light through her blouse and turn God’s holy rite into a wet T-shirt contest. Personally, the Reverend Brendel did not object to this, because it reminded him warmly of the nurturing qualities of baptism. But there were the less sophisticated men in the congregation to consider.

Suddenly, his hand still in the water, there was a brilliant outburst at the microphone, like old-fashioned photo-flash powder going off, and the Reverend Malcolm Brendel was slammed to the ground, where he lay unmoving, eyes staring sightlessly into the top of the tent, searching for the hereafter.

After three or four seconds of stunned silence, a vast communal groan went up from the crowd. Karen was pulled shrieking, but uninjured, from the trough. A man was heard to shout almost hysterically, “It’s the will of God!”

But next to him, a woman whose name was recorded as Mrs. Irene Pavelka, matron of a family that farmed near Hutchinson, Kansas, was heard to say even more loudly, “But it’s not my will!”

Naively, Mrs. Pavelka did not realize that electrocution is forever.

She leaped to her feet and ran to where Brendel lay dead in the mud and fell to her ample knees. She wasted no time in prayer, but instead pressed her mouth fervently to his narrow lips and began to breathe her own life into his lungs. She alternated this with vigorously pumping his chest with the heels of her hands.

This went on for an interminable minute, while the crowd edged toward chaos. Help could not be immediately summoned because the tent stood in the middle of a pasture and no phones were available. Three or four men had run for the nearest farmhouse.

Suddenly Malcolm Brendel began to cough and gasp as he tried to struggle to his feet. Several men emerged from the crowd and held him down, offering him water, but he would have none of it. Irene Pavelka slumped back in exhaustion, leaning against the cattle trough, her chest heaving.

Thirty-five minutes later, after an ambulance had arrived and Brendel had been removed for treatment, one of the visiting pastors, who had already preached during the day, rose and addressed the audience. He was careful to select a different microphone and avoid the mud around the trough.

“We,” he began, in a voice that boomed through the crowd and brought it back to attention, “have been privileged tonight to witness the awesome power of almighty God, who has seen fit to raise our brother Malcolm from the grip of death. Let us kneel and give thanks.”

Gradually a sense of unique privilege permeated the worshippers, that of an opportunity never to be repeated, and hundreds came forward to be baptized and link their personal salvation to the night of the miracle. The very presence of God could be felt throughout the tent.

Unknown to the crowd, this was the final night of Malcolm Brendel’s lay ministry. Upon his release from the hospital in Garden City, he was diverted to a different, if not higher, calling. Like Paul on the road to Damascus, the Reverend Malcolm Brendel embarked on the fork less traveled, a path that would ultimately lead him to the office of vice president of the United States.

Amen.

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