



HERRINGWOOD
MESSIAH
PROLOGUE

L.R. Bakker

A BRIEF WORD FROM YOUR AUTHOR

At first, Herringwood Messiah didn't have a prologue. Then it suddenly did, and after that, it had another one, before once again not having one at all. Finally, I learned that a prologue is often used to introduce new characters, so the prologue was back again, this time in the form you can see below.

However, for pacing reasons, the prologue was once again cut from the final manuscript. One or two elements of the following have been inserted into the main story, but I still feel it's kinda fun, and it tells us something about Rigby and Yaeger.

So that's why you can now read it for free. However, please be aware that this prologue is unedited and hasn't enjoyed a thorough proofread.

Enjoy.

HERRINGWOOD MESSIAH PROLOGUE

Half an hour due west of Herringwood lay May Valley. Maybe forty-five minutes, depending on traffic and route of choice.

In May Valley lay Old Street, which used to be called Main Street, but when the May Valley Auditorium was built, traffic started clogging it up during events and concerts. A new street was made, which became New Main Street, and it doesn't matter to this story one bit.

On Old Street, a car was parked, and in that car sat a man named Rigby, checking a text message. He should have been checking his email, but because he grew up before smartphones, reading texts was the best he could hope for without accidentally setting the menus to Japanese.

His church and employer in Salt Creek knew this. Or rather, Vanessa, the receptionist of his employer, and she took it upon

herself to send him the most pertinent information by text. She was nice like that.

Rigby felt rather blessed. His family had always been part of the Latter-Day Saints until a man called Sam Hall founded the Current Day Saints because he didn't see eye to eye with the established church. Though Sam Hall made alterations to their doctrine, he did agree with many others, which remained unchanged, like the discouragement to drink coffee. But if one spent a lot of their time sitting in a car watching people, this quickly fell by the wayside.

Rigby looked up when the passenger side door opened, and his colleague entered the car. He put a tray with two cups of coffee from the franchise shop around the corner on the dashboard.

"Thank you Brother Yaeger," Rigby said and took the cup marked *Rick B.*

"Did I miss anything?" Yaeger asked. He was in his late twenties and while he thought the Great Mission was important work, he often wished the work would be a little more interesting.

Rigby glanced at Craig's Carpentry across the street. "No. He's in there, doing carpentry stuff. Nothing miraculous yet. Could you check your email?"

"Why?"

"Because I asked you to."

"Is it important?"

"You'd know if you checked."

"But why do you want me to check?"

Rigby looked at him. He didn't want to say he was the senior missionary here and hoped a frown would do. When it didn't, he said, "Vanessa sent me a text about Brother Muller. I want to know the details."

"So check it yourself."

"I want you to check it."

"You accidentally set your menus to French again, didn't you?"

Rigby pursed his lips. Not yet, he didn't. But it was only a matter of time, and he didn't want to admit it.

"No, I have to keep an eye on the shop. That's why we're here."

"Right."

Yaeger knew he would end up checking the email anyway, no matter how long he argued, and his coffee was getting cold.

"Says here that Brother Muller is still in a coma," he said after getting his phone out.

"Vanessa told me that much," Rigby answered with a grim look.

In a freak accident, Muller and Gardner's toppled into a sudden, deep sinkhole, landing on its roof. Gardner died on impact, and things weren't looking good for the CDS's current oldest member.

"She said something about photos. Does the mail expand on that?"

Yaeger checked. "No. Just that Mike and Algernon are looking into it."

"Oh, the whole Research department," Rigby scoffed. "Spared no expense, did they?"

"What got into you all of a sudden?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where's the loyal acolyte Rigby gone?"

"Try saying it without that tone. Just once."

Rigby looked at him with pursed lips, and Yaeger wondered if he really needed to try, but then Rigby snorted.

"I'm sorry," he said, shaking his head. "I should lead by example. I know Brother Muller well, and I know if he thought he needed to photograph something, we should make darn sure we investigate every pixel of it."

He paused and stared out. They weren't facing the carpentry shop, so he was looking at nothing, and Yaeger let him. There was clearly more on his mind.

After a while Rigby said it. “I worry for Muller. He shouldn’t go out like this, or at all, because without his hunches we’d be nowhere.”

Yaeger saw a tall, young man come around the corner and pulled up his nose. *Goths*. Heathens, as far as Yaeger was concerned, though he couldn’t quite substantiate why these people rubbed him the wrong way.

“I’m sure Brother Muller will pull through,” Yaeger tried.

Rigby didn’t share those thoughts, as much as he wanted to. The longer a coma lasted, the less chance the patient had, and it had been a month already.

The goth walked into Betty’s Thrift Store where they could just see how Betty welcomed him with a cup of tea.

“If you ask me, we should be watching the thrift store. What do a goth and a little old lady have in common?”

“Second-hand clothes. If you’d watched instead of just looked, you could have seen he didn’t look like your standard Hot Topic goth.”

“Are you making these things up? You’re always seeing things I don’t.”

Rigby grinned. These young missionaries saw what they were taught to see but not yet everything there was to see. Rigby was no Sherlock Holmes, but sometimes it just came down to the simple things. The frill at the end of the young man’s sleeves was just that kind of off-white you got in truly old clothes. You couldn’t buy that straight off the rack. No matter how well you looked after your coat, a certain amount of wear and tear just occurred naturally, and those were the details that Rigby noticed. Readily apparent, if you bothered to look.

“But we’re not watching the thrift store,” he said and returned his attention to Craig’s Carpentry. Yaeger took a gander as well.

“Why, though? Seems like the Old Man’s grasping--”

“Don’t call him that.”

“Sorry, sure. Mr. Hall. Seems like he’s grasping at straws. If we have to check every carpenter in the country, we’re not going to Kolob anytime soon.”

“Muller’s legendary hunches,” Rigby mumbled.

“Right.”

For a while, they stared at a shop that didn’t show any significant signs of life. They’d grown accustomed to this, moving from location to location to look at shops, houses, and the people in them, hoping to find what they were looking for.

All things considered, it could be worse. They weren’t catching any direct sunlight on this side of the street, and if they had to live in a car, this one was definitely roomy. Certainly no replacement for home, but one gets used to being on the road most of the time.

“Not a lot of business, huh?” Yaeger said.

“Not a lot of people can afford handcrafted furniture or are willing to spend money on it.”

Rigby nodded at the street ahead of them. A blaze red convertible Miata careened around the corner, though it wasn’t in any particular hurry. The driver just seemed to know these streets well enough to take liberties with traffic safety.

When the car came closer and slowed down, Yaeger could see the white leather interior and the auburn-haired woman behind the wheel.

“Ugh, gaudy.”

“People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones, Brother Yaeger.”

“What?”

“We’re sitting in a black Escalade with tinted windows. We’re not in a position to comment on other people’s cars.”

“I wasn’t talking about the car.”

The car Yaeger wasn’t talking about stopped at the curb, and the woman he was talking about got out, providing a tantalizing look at the clothes she was almost wearing. The woodcutter’s blouse was tight but overall acceptable summer clothing. The cut-off

shorts were a different story. She might as well not have bothered with them at all.

“Get the camera,” Rigby said urgently.

“Gladly.”

Rigby briefly looked disapproving at Yaeger. “You can forego the lecherous tone.”

Yaeger was too busy reaching back to get it and started snapping pictures as she walked into the carpentry shop.

“Did you get her?” Rigby asked when the snapping stopped.

“Just the backside, which, I admit, does look like God’s work.”

Rigby snorted. She was an attractive woman for sure, but he chose not to notice because he had a wife and son waiting for him at home. It didn’t matter how little he saw them, they were there.

“Keep the camera ready for when she comes back out.”

“Because we want to see her face. Sure.”

“What did I say about that tone?”

Yaeger chuckled and got comfortable. “So far, so good, though.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s a carpenter, Jewish, and apparently deals with harlots.”

Rigby turned to him and raised an eyebrow. “Not every woman whose buttocks hang out of her shorts is a prostitute.”

Yaeger scoffed. “My parents may have always been CDS, but I had a life before I was born again, brother. While you may tell the quality of a goth by his sleeves, I have an eye for certain things, too.”

“Aren’t you a man of the world all of a sudden.”

“We all have our specialties, that’s what makes the CDS so effective.”

Rigby thought he detected a hint of sarcasm in there but decided to let it go. He wasn’t necessarily against arguing to help this kid see the bigger picture, but it was important to keep a close eye on the shop now. They needed to take pictures of that woman when she came out, which, if Yaeger were actually right, would be at least an hour from now.

He wasn't sure if it would turn up anything. He wasn't as good as Brother Muller, whose hunches bordered on legendary. But there was a woman going into the shop of the man they were staking out, so she had to be checked.

Despite Rigby's opinions in the heat of the moment earlier, the CDS research department was quite capable, even with the limited resources at their disposal. With some creativity, even just a stray social media account could yield interesting results.

Fifteen minutes later, the woman came back out, and Yaeger started snapping more pictures. Before she got back in the car, she produced a pack of Luckies from the pocket of her shorts. Both Rigby and Yaeger looked on in awe—not so much because she was an attractive woman but because she clearly possessed the ability to conjure cigarettes from another dimension. There was no way those shorts had the extra space required to accommodate a whole pack.

“I think we found a sorceress,” Yaeger said.

“I would agree if I believed in magic...”

With a freshly lit cigarette between her lips, the woman got back in her convertible and raced off.

Yaeger started uploading the pictures to the CDS server. “God isn't magic, then?”

“No. God is divine. That's something completely different.”

“I'd say we just witnessed a small miracle, though.”

Rigby smirked at Yaeger. “Try to get your head out of her shorts.”

Yaeger had no choice but to do so, as his phone demanded his attention. So did Rigby's, but only one of them was able to access their email without groaning and cursing.

“Whelp...” Yaeger sighed. “I just took a whole bunch of pictures for nothing.”

“They analyzed them that quickly?”

“Of course not, but we're being reassigned.”

Yaeger handed his phone over. Rigby put on his glasses and read the mail.

“Muller’s hunch paid off...”

In the pictures Muller took in Las Vegas was a woman who piqued his interest, and through the unrelenting work of Mike and Algernon she had been traced back to a church in Herringwood.

“And we’re the closest team,” Rigby mumbled.

“Yeah, but we’re also checking out a Jewish carpenter who deals with prostitutes. And we’re looking for a man. Not a woman.”

“That’s only relative these days, and it doesn’t matter. We’ve got our orders.” Rigby started the car. “Seatbelt.”

Yaeger strapped in and took one more look at the shop before they drove off. Seemed like a waste to him. This guy fit all the criteria, and now they were supposed to go sit outside a church like it was that easy.

Driving down the long road out of May Valley, Yaeger complained.

“This is dumb. And all because some guy in Vegas took a picture of a random woman.”

“Muller took that picture for a reason.”

“Probably the same reason you wanted pictures of that half-dressed woman.”

Rigby scowled at Yaeger. “Probably. Yes. I assume Muller also took pictures of a woman because she was a *person of interest*.”

“Alright, alright. Point taken.”

Yaeger stared out the window as they turned onto the long road to Herringwood. The town of May Valley stopped abruptly and was replaced with apparently unused fields bordered by woods that looked like he could do some nice hunting there. Perhaps he would return here someday to try it out.

He reached into the backseat to still his hunger with an energy bar.

“Want one?” he asked Rigby.

“No thanks.”

They’d both grown tired of the energy bars before they even got to May Valley, but it often wasn’t possible to get a decent meal. By the time they entered Herringwood, Yaeger stuffed the wrapper in the door pocket for later disposal, and when he looked back up, he saw a diner.

It had a quaint fifties aesthetic—probably because it had been here since the fifties—but it seemed far too out of the way to attract customers, considering they had barely made it into town yet.

“I think this is that chicken leg place,” Yaeger realized out loud. “Can we stop for a bite?”

Rigby slowed down and examined the place. Then he sped up again.

“No.”

“Aw, come on!”

“Yaeger, even you must have seen the police cruiser out front.”

He had. But he chose to ignore it in hopes that would make Rigby magically not see it.

“We’re not doing anything wrong,” he tried.

Rigby shook his head curtly. “No, and that’s final. We spy on people. We don’t want to sit shoulder to shoulder with the police.”

Grumbling, Yaeger crossed his arms, and the scenery kept zooming by. Passing an ostrich farm, he was sure this was just a podunk town where nothing interesting happened, though his stomach wondered if the ostrich farm and the diner had any connection.

The town itself didn’t seem any more interesting. Residential areas dotted around commercial zones, just like every other hole they’d been to. Though most of the other places didn’t have a lake that faintly smelled of dead fish, so that was new.

At their destination, Rigby parked the car between others under the trees along a lane, and Yaeger sighed.

“Is my parking not to your liking, Brother Yaeger?”

“Your parking is fine. I’d even go as far as to call it flawless, but this?” Yaeger gestured at the small church in front of them. “Are we actually watching a church now?”

Rigby nodded, and Yaeger sighed.

“Salt Creek is clutching at straws, I tell you.”

“They might be,” Rigby answered, “but they’re grasping at this straw for a reason, and it is up to us to find out why.”

Yaeger grumbled and tried to get comfortable. “Mind if I take a nap?”

“If it stops your complaining.”

It would for the duration of the nap, but after that, Yaeger probably had more to complain about. Sleeping in the car wasn’t exactly great for his back.

THE END. SORT OF.

If you enjoyed that, be sure to check out the whole story. If you didn't like that, check out the whole story anyway to see if it gets any better.

And if you haven't already, grab a copy of the first one, *As Far As Souls Go*, to get up to speed for *Herringwood Messiah*.

Keep an eye on the website or the socials for more information and a dash of nonsense.

Website: bakkerbaard.nl

Instagram: [mister.bakker](https://www.instagram.com/mister.bakker)

Facebook: [MisterBakkerWrites](https://www.facebook.com/MisterBakkerWrites)

X: [Tweetbaard](https://twitter.com/Tweetbaard)