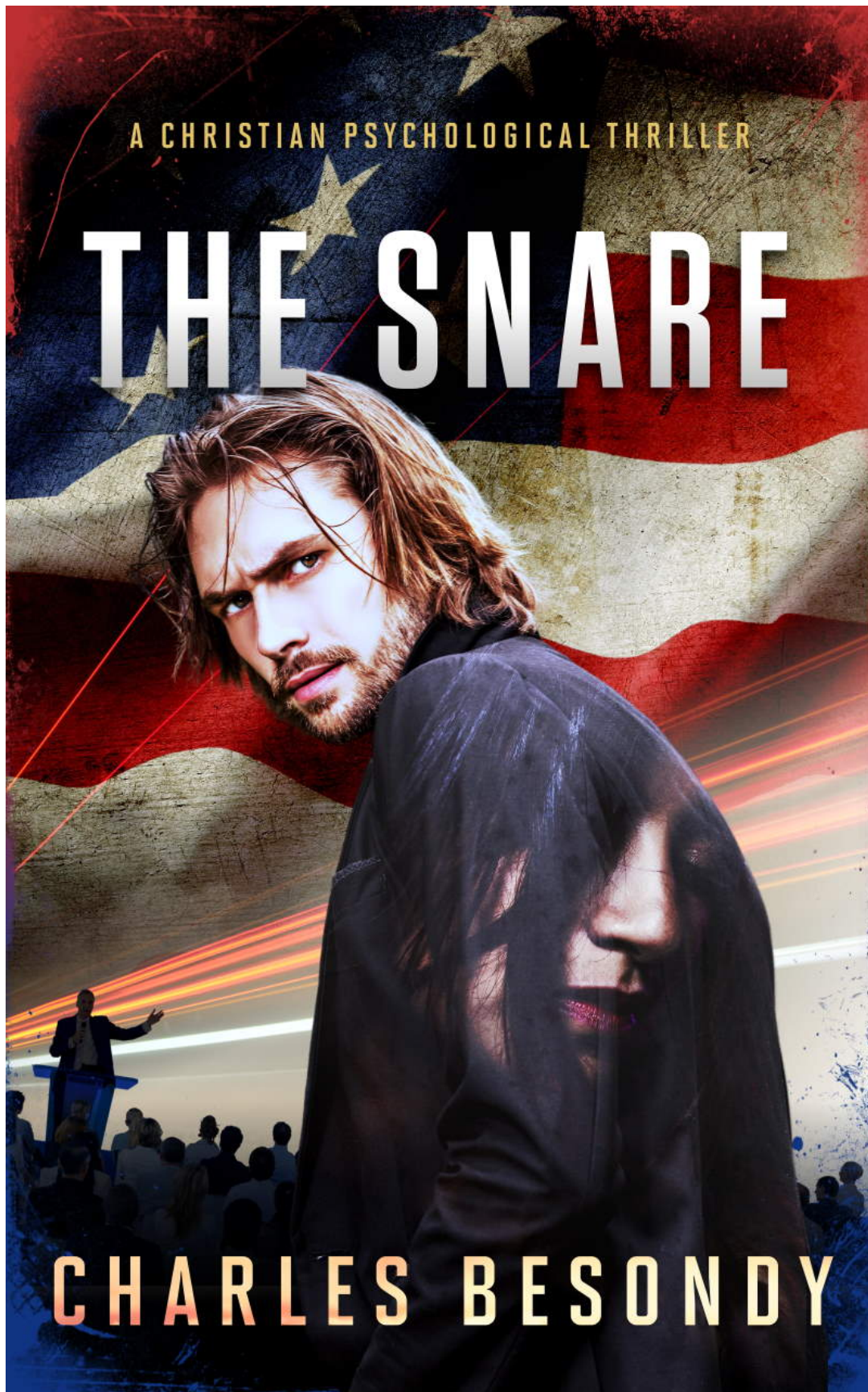


A CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

# THE SNARE

CHARLES BESONDY



## The Snare: A Christian Psychological Thriller

Charles Besondy

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## Dedication

For Sofy, because without her inspiration, love, and unyielding support this book would not exist.

## Quotations

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” – Matthew 7:15 NIV

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” – Ephesians 6:12 NIV

“Surely he will save you  
from the fowler’s snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.” – Psalm 9:3 NIV

## Author’s Note

Readers may have noticed the face of evil has become progressively more pronounced in my books since 2018. Evil was simply a crippling lie in the mind of Clay Austin in Book One, *The Hidden Saboteur*. However, evil took on shape and form in Book Two, *The Chase*, with the introduction of The Figure in Gray. I’m sure many of you thought he was Satan – close but no cigar.

In *The Snare* you’ll learn that The Figure in Gray actually has a name, Phobley, and he is one of the legions of dark angels who roam Earth. Read on – you’re about to meet their boss. Perhaps you know him already.

The story takes place between the years of 2038 and 2039, however I deliberately avoided the temptation to describe a futuristic world. That’s not my speciality. I rationalized that thinking so hard about what the Pacific Northwest might look like in 2038 would be a distraction for me.

The story had to unfold in 2038 so that the chronology would mesh with two earlier books in the series, *The Hidden Saboteur* and *The Chase*.

The influence of several authors can be seen at play in the story.

At the top of the list are the Apostles Paul and Matthew, who need no introduction.

The mind-bending concept of parallel worlds comes from no other than C. S. Lewis and Ted Dekker.

Chuck Missler, through his talks and sermons, expanded my knowledge of what the Bible reveals about Satan, demons, and dark angels.

As for socialism, I was informed by the writing of Dinesh D’Souza, Burgess Owens, Glenn Beck, and the team of Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson.

All of these gifted thinkers and authors fed my imagination, for which I am eternally grateful. Having said that, don’t forget you are about to embark on a fictional journey even if it reads like the evening news.

The protagonist in the story is the son of Clay and Sheryl Austin. My readers will recognize Clay from *The Hidden Saboteur*, and Sheryl from *The Chase*. In these novels, Clay and Sheryl each face unrelenting lies and deception from evil forces that nearly take their faith and their lives.

But they persevere by the grace of God. In each of their stories, a beautiful, decommissioned lighthouse miraculously restores their hope and faith.

Evil failed with Clay and Sheryl. It has vowed to succeed with their son, Charley. Welcome to Book Three of The Lighthouse Series.

## Prologue

It's 2038.

In the small coastal town of Reef Bay, Washington, Charley Austin is graduating from high school. He's looking forward to starting his freshman year at the University of Oregon in the fall.

He has no way of knowing that his life will be hell for the next nine months.

That's because he is Project C-682, a pet project, of Phobley, whose goal is to destroy the boy – not to kill him physically but to destroy his faith. And for that purpose, Phobley has a sinister and seductive plan.

Charley grew up, privileged and loved, in an award-winning home on a tall bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. What made the property unique wasn't so much the stylish home or the breathtaking view; it was the lighthouse, and its impact on the lives near it.

The 117-foot structure was built in 1874 and decommissioned in 1998. Clay Austin, Charley's father, inherited the property in 2017. Ironically, Clay Austin used to have terrible dreams about stormy nights inside a lighthouse. Now he owns one. And from the minute he took possession of the property the scars of the past faded and his life began to change.

One of those changes for Clay involved getting married to Sheryl Landing in 2018.

Sheryl had precious few happy memories of her childhood, but several of those were recollections of picnics on the grounds of the same lighthouse she now owned with her husband. Her paintings frequently featured abstracts of the lighthouse and cliffs. One hung in their living room above the fireplace. It was "Tower Beam," so named because it was unclear whether the brilliantly white column was a lighthouse tower reaching up into the sky or a beam of light reaching down to earth from heaven. It was the same vision she had had that May night in 2019 when she looked in terror to shore as her body was being swept out to sea.

At eighteen, while getting ready for his high school graduation ceremony, Charley Austin can't know that nine months from now he'll be climbing the lighthouse stairs yearning for truth.

As for Phobley, he's under tremendous pressure to perform. Failure is not an option, not when you're working for Lucky Zebul, The Leader, The One. Not when Lucky Zebul's sinister plan for the world is coming to a climax right on schedule.

The problem for Phobley is that the ever-increasing production quota of souls leaves him precious little time for destroying C-682, and in so doing, getting even with the brat's mother and father, two of his failed Projects.

Phobley is determined to regain favor with The Leader, be reappointed to the Executive Council, and destroy C-682. It's all possible, except when his Adversary gets in the way.

[Chapters 3-5 and 9-58 have been removed ifrom this sample. The full version is available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) ]

## Part 1: Getting Lucky

### Chapter 1

1

[Outside Roswell, New Mexico, the Gateway Bush, June 2038]

The 1,600-mile journey had lasted three seconds.

Phobley opened his eyes and immediately squinted in pain against the harsh noon sun that reflected off the barren, reddish-brown mountainside in front of him. He spat angrily, the spittle sizzling and foaming in the iron-rich dirt at his feet.

This was the last place on Earth he wanted to be right now – being here took him away from his duties in Seattle. Didn't the Council know he didn't have time for meetings? Didn't The One appreciate the continuous effort necessary to achieve the precious quota?

Phobley withdrew a pair of wraparound sunglasses from a gray coat pocket and placed them over his bronze eyes. He wouldn't have to be in the glare of the New Mexico sun much longer – not if he found *the* Bush soon.

He scanned the surface of the steep hill seeking the thorny, brownish-green Bush that looked to the casual observer like any other cholla cactus on the mountainside. But there was nothing ordinary about it. He loved the irony of the Bush. Moses had encountered God at a burning bush. Phobley and the others used a bush to pass once a year into their world – to Sheolus.

Walking slowly through the loose rocks at the base of the mountain, he knew he was close. The Bush's vibration was growing in intensity – a signal that only he and others like him could sense. Well, that wasn't exactly true.

A chance encounter of the Bush's energy waves by an amateur minerals prospector in the summer of 1947 threatened to draw attention to the Bush's unworldly properties. Phobley remembered well the event and the days that followed—they were the pinnacle of his career.

It was different now. He wasn't on the Council. He wasn't a member of any influential committees. He had fallen out of favor, all because he'd refused to play politics. And now nearly a hundred years after he had saved the secret of Sheolus, he had to attend yet another annual meeting where he had to ignore the sneers of the others and kneel before The One to receive his performance review.

2

After taking six more steps to the left he knew he had arrived. Strong, pleasurable vibrations rippled through his gray body. And there it was: The bush-like cactus stood nearly eight feet high with branches extending out five feet on all sides. All he needed to do was walk into it and enter home – Sheolus. But procedure prohibited him from doing so without first ensuring he wasn't being watched. The One would vaporize him if the gateway was discovered because of his carelessness. So he followed the same routine as the others who had arrived before him, and those who'd arrive after.



He turned to face the vastness of the flat desert below. Hundreds of square miles, void of human life, spread as far as the eye could see like a dirty brown carpet baking in the sun. He didn't simply look for signs of life; he opened all of his supernatural senses to perceive any presence of human beings. Nothing.

As was Phobley's custom, before walking into the Bush and entering Sheolus, he began a silent ritual acknowledging those who had sacrificed their existence to protect the Bush—and the secret it concealed. Phobley faced the open desert, dropped to his knees, and stretched both arms out from his sides. He honored the fallen by remembering that blistering hot summer day in 1947 when he had stood here making the decision that rendered him a hero but erased nineteen of his brothers from existence.

## Chapter 2

### 1

[Outside Roswell, New Mexico, the Gateway Bush, July 1, 1947]

In the afternoon of that July day in 1947 Phobley had just transmitted himself to the mountainside and was preparing to approach the Bush when a solitary man appeared about fifty yards away, walking slowly, head down, some sort of tools or instruments held in both hands.

To conceal himself, Phobley had instantly transformed, like a chameleon, to blend into the mountainside. Closer and closer the man walked until when he was only about ten feet from the Bush, the instruments in his hands started making loud, annoying noises.

Phobley continued to watch as the man adjusted each instrument, and slowly began walking in a pattern as if seeking the source of what the instruments were sensing. The man, eyes down at the ground, was being led by his instruments directly toward the Bush. Phobley reasoned that the man's instruments had to be picking up the unique energy waves that the Bush emitted.

At all costs, the man had to be stopped. Phobley could have killed the man easily enough, but if the human didn't return home there would be a search party drawing many others to this very spot. No, the man had to be stopped in a way that he'd return home without remembering what the instruments had reported.

### 2

Jeffrey Longfellow was about to call it a day. He had been searching for evidence of uranium ore and gold nuggets at the base of the mountainside since morning without luck. Neither his Geiger counter nor the metal detector in his hands had given him any reason to be hopeful for a find.

He resolved to walk a few more yards farther up the slope before returning to his car parked several miles away. Thoughts of the chicken dinner and cold beer that awaited him back home were suddenly jarred out of his mind by the alarms sounding from both of his instruments. He stopped and looked at the Geiger counter's meter. The vibrating needle was pointing to the right, indicating strong radiation was present. His metal detector's meter was also going crazy.

Longfellow walked slowly forward with his eyes glued on the two instruments.

"What on earth?"

In seven years of prospecting, he'd never seen signals this strong. He stopped and looked around. Nothing but dirt, rock, and cholla cactus. He began slowly walking this way and that to identify in which direction the signals were the strongest. The meters didn't fluctuate.

"Jeffrey, you must be standing right on it," he mumbled.

## 3

Phobley looked up at the mountainside above them, where he noticed a rock the size of a small melon sitting on a ledge above. A single flick of his finger caused the rock to dislodge and fall straight down. It struck the man on the head with a glancing blow. He staggered three wobbly steps before collapsing heavily on top of the two instruments. Phobley heard the faint sound of breaking glass.

Moments later Phobley watched the man regain consciousness, stand uneasily, and look around confused. He picked up the two instruments, cursed at the cracked glass that covered the meters, and slowly walked back down the hill, rubbing his head.

Phobley had waited until the man was out of sight before regaining his form. He knew the man would return home safely, with only a mild concussion, but any memory of the unusual instrument readings would be gone. Phobley had saved the day with his quick decision, but it still left open the possibility of the man regaining his memory or returning another day to the same spot. The situation had to be reported, which is exactly what he had done after entering the Bush and crossing into Sheolus.

## 4

A day after reporting the incident to Hadley, the head of the Council, he was summoned to appear in a small private room in the back of the Great Hall.

He had been in the room only a minute when the door swung open and Hadley entered.

"Prepare yourself to receive him," Hadley ordered in his usual cold, grim manner.

Phobley hadn't expected this – a meeting with The One, their exalted leader. He dropped to one knee, head bowed.

Seconds later Phobley felt the atmosphere in the room change. The temperature rose and the air began to crackle like static electricity on Earth.

"Hello, Phobley. Please stand. It's so nice to see you again."

Phobley stood and looked into the broadly smiling face and crystal blue eyes of Lucky Zebul.

"Hadley and the Council told me of the incident with the prospector yesterday. You did well, Phobley. You did well by minimizing the threat and reporting it."

"I was just doing my duty, sir," replied Phobley.

"You did well and I'm going to reward you. I'm expanding your territory to include the Northwest Region."

"That is generous, sir." Phobley tried to sound grateful but calculated the additional territory would add to his already high quota. One never refused a promotion by Lucky Zebul. "May I ask, what will Deimy be doing now that he isn't running the Northwest?"

"Deimy has received a special assignment ... which brings me to your second reward. I'm going to share with you the plans I've already put into place to protect the Bush and the possible discovery of Sheolus."



Lucky Zebul rarely explained his plans to the army of angels under his command. He just gave orders and demanded they be executed flawlessly.

"I'm honored, sir."

"I'll announce it to the others during the Annual Declaration in the Great Hall, but I want you to be among the first to hear."

"Yes, sir," Phobley said.

"I've worked ... sorry ... we've worked long and hard to make humans believe that I don't exist," Lucky Zebul said. "Their defenses have been weakened."

"A beautiful deception, sir. If I might add, the latest data indicates that 49 percent of the population doesn't believe you exist," commented Hadley from the corner of the room, always eager to show the Leader that he's on top of the statistics.

"Yes, thank you, Hadley. I am proud of how effective the deception has been. However, as you'll hear in my Declaration tonight, we must take additional steps so that within a hundred years that number is much, much higher. When I appear on Earth full-time, the majority of the population must see me as hope, nothing less. They cannot suspect the truth," Lucky Zebul said.

"A hundred years? So soon?" Hadley exclaimed.

"Yes, as I will announce tonight, in 2038 on the Earth's calendar, I will begin to emerge as the global leader."

"May I ask, why 2038?" Phobley said. "That's less than one hundred earth years from now."

"Phobley, our time is running out. Do you think God is going to let us reign on earth forever?"

"Well --"

"Of course, He isn't. We're a thorn in His side and we'll be plucked out one day, but until then the Earth will be mine. Lucky Zebul slammed his fist onto the table next to him, sending a hairline crack through the length of the gray granite slab.

"The other deception, I remind you, is we've successfully limited human's willingness to believe only what they can see, hear, smell, or prove mathematically. Look at how humans grasp science as if it were a god. The whole "Science is Real" thing is simply marvelous because we've turned it into one of our strongest tools. God can't be scientifically proven, I can't be scientifically proven, Heaven can't be proven, and Sheolus can't be proven either. And so, Phobley, what do we have?"

"A population unwilling to accept spiritual faith?" Phobley said.

"Exactly! And this brings me to the importance of concealing Sheolus. If the existence of Sheolus were discovered, can you see how that would undermine everything we've been working for all these centuries?"

"Yes, sir," Phobley said. "Humans cannot be permitted to believe that parallel worlds are possible."

"Why is that? It's imperative you, Hadley, and the others understand," Lucky Zebul said.

"Well, if parallel worlds – other dimensions – are possible, then Sheolus is possible ... you are possible," Phobley said, happy to be able to show the Leader his quick grasp of the situation.

"You got it. But the near discovery of the Gateway Bush has led me to take additional precautions ... another grand deception is required to protect our secret.

"Yes, sir," Hadley said.

"A plan has already been put into place that will forever steer mankind's attention away from the possibility of parallel worlds. I've ordered Deimy and eighteen other comrades to come here,

not through the usual transmission channel, but by airship. They are to create seven unusual flying machines and land near the Bush,” Lucky Zebul said, his brilliant blue eyes dancing with excitement.

“I don’t understand, sir,” Phobley said. “Certainly, the airships will be seen by the human’s extensive radar system in New Mexico. They’ll be detected.”

“Exactly, Phobley. I’m counting on it.”

Lucky Zebul, leader of the dark angels, abruptly turned and left the room.

5

Late that night, immediately following the Annual Declaration, the angels left the Great Hall, exited through the Gateway Bush, and gathered briefly on the hillside to say goodbye before transmitting themselves to their respective regions around the world.

Seconds later the desert mountainside was still and dark, lit only by a million stars.

## Chapter 3

1

[San Francisco, California, Marina District, July 8, 1947]

## Chapter 4

## Chapter 5

## Chapter 6

1

[Reef Bay, Washington, the Austin home, June 2038]

“I have to admit, Sheryl, I’m not going to miss that noise when he’s away at school,” Clay Austin said, nodding toward the upstairs bedroom where a cacophony of drumming was pounding through the house from their son’s room.

Sheryl placed a macchiato for him and a mug of Earl Gray tea for her on the breakfast table before seating herself.

“I agree, but you have to admit he’s pretty good. It’s a shame he won’t be able to practice in the dorm,” Sheryl said.

“Remember, I urged him to try out for the school marching band, but he didn’t think it was cool.”

“It’s probably best for him to limit the extracurricular activities in his freshman year anyway,” Sheryl said.

“Yep. I struggled my first year.”

“Yeah, me too. I think I only received one B grade the whole year,” Sheryl said.

Clay saw the familiar smirk on his wife's face.

"Yeah, one B and the rest As," he said, slowly shaking his head. It had been a while since she had teased him, in fun, of her superior college performance at the University of Oregon. He had managed to graduate with a 3.4 grade point average – a perfectly respectable effort – whereas Sheryl had graduated magna cum laude in both Art and Business. But it was her emotional intelligence, more than anything else, that Clay admired.

Sheryl patted his hand where it rested on the kitchen table.

"Charley got my brains, but he got your ... um ... he got your ..." Sheryl pretended to search hard for what qualities their eighteen-year-old son had inherited from his father.

"Hair. He got my great hair, remember?" Clay responded, happy to play along.

In truth Charley Austin's DNA was rich with positive characteristics from both parents. From Sheryl he received a brilliant mind and striking good looks that had lost their effeminate nature as he progressed into his later teens. His facial features became less rounded, more chiseled. And indeed, he did have a head of long, wavy hair – just like what his father used to have. When Charley played the drums his hair would swirl around wildly until eventually cascading over his face. Also from his father, Clay inherited a clever wit, a gregarious personality, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Three months from now Charley would start college, majoring in Marketing – one more thing he had absorbed from his parents, a love of the analytical and creative facets of Marketing. Clay had co-founded and managed a famous marketing company in Seattle, Austin-Davis, until selling it twenty-one years ago and moving to Reef Bay a rich man. Sheryl had made a name for herself at the Seattle Art Museum, before eventually joining Austin-Davis to work for Clay's agency. Since getting married twenty years ago the couple had been running a highly sought-after consulting practice focused on coaching nonprofits and churches how to market effectively.

"Speaking of school, what time is Charley's graduation ceremony today?" Clay asked. "It's going to be held at the school, right?"

"Four-thirty in the school auditorium."

"Right. I'll call Monroe Ford and have them deliver the car to the gate around two," Clay said.

"Perfect," Sheryl said, grinning at the thought of the shining graduation gift they had secretly purchased for their son. "Don't forget that all of us are having dinner with the Bentons after the ceremony. I've reserved the small private room at Surfview Bistro for 7:15," Sheryl said.

The drumming stopped and moments later, a sweaty Charley Austin strode directly past his parents to the refrigerator. He fetched a can of Dr Pepper from the refrigerator and took a long drink before eventually closing the door and turning to his parents, still seated at the kitchen table.

"How did I sound?"

"You mean besides loud?" Sheryl said with a wink.

"Yeah, 'besides loud.' I've been learning that solo Dad suggested."

"I recognized it, son. 'Moby Dick' by Led Zeppelin. That solo by John Bonham is over sixty years old. What do you think of it?" Clay said.

"Amazing. I still can't match his foot pedal speed, though."

"Few can. Hey, mind if I bang around on your set while you're away at school? I always wanted to play."

"Um, I guess so. But you know the rules ..."

“Don’t worry, I’ll replace whatever I break,” Clay said.

“Hey, after graduation there’s a party at Zonk’s. Okay if I go?”

“Did you forget we’re having dinner with the Bentons?” Sheryl said.

“No, that’s cool. Party doesn’t start until nine or so.”

“Will Zonk’s parents be home?” Sheryl asked.

“Yeah, I think so.”

“That’s fine. What time will you be home?”

“One.”

“How about midnight, young man?” Clay interjected.

“Ah, come on, it’s graduation. I might never see some of these kids again.”

Sheryl and Clay looked at each other.

“What do you think, honey, can he stay out later tonight?” Clay said.

“Well, he is on the Honor Role. He did receive a scholarship ... but the lawn hasn’t been mowed yet, and it’s supposed to rain this afternoon,” Sheryl said.

“I’m doing it next, promise,” Charley said.

“Twelve-thirty, young man. I want to hear the front door open by twelve-thirty,” Clay said.

“Okay, deal.” Charley kissed Sheryl’s forehead before racing out the back door to the shed holding the lawn equipment.

In silence Sheryl sipped her tea while Clay drained the remainder of his macchiato.

“You know, luv, we’ve raised a pretty amazing son,” Clay said.

“Praise God. Praise God,” Shery responded.

## Chapter 7

### 1

[Monroe Coastal Ford, Reef Bay, Washington, June 2038]

Melvin Bigsby’s head throbbed and his stomach roiled, threatening to spew its sour contents all over the garage floor and the glimmering yellow Mustang he was working on. Last night at the Blue Moon he had been over-served – again. He needed sleep, but his Saturday shift wasn’t over until three o’clock. He had to keep it together until then.

And that wasn’t going to be easy. Some idiot was standing outside the open garage bay door smoking a cigar. The cigar smoke’s stench penetrated the heavy scent of lubrication fluids in the garage and seemed to attack Melvin’s senses and sensitive stomach.

At least he had a simple job to do right now, nothing technical like replacing a timing belt. He was installing custom wheels on a Mustang hatchback. And if he hadn’t felt like puking, he’d be admiring the car more. When it came to automobiles, Melvin was a purest. And this car was for those who appreciated the growl of a gasoline-powered V8 versus the polite whirring of an electric motor. These days, most of the Ford models sold at Monroe Coastal Ford were electric, but there remained customers who were fond of gas-powered cars and typically parked both types of vehicles in their garages.

The car, elevated on the power lift in front of him, was a 2038 Mustang with a retro design, making it look like the Mustangs sold between 2020 and 2025. There was a 460-horsepower V8 under the hood. The metallic saffron yellow paint showed off the car’s lines extremely well. Whoever had bought this car had money and class. Even the custom wheels he was installing

seemed to be a perfect visual fit for the car. Yep, he thought, whoever configured this baby knows style.

Melvin removed the four stock tires and spent the next half hour remounting and balancing the tires onto the new custom wheels. That done, he rolled one tire at a time into place before lifting each onto the lug bolts, wrestling the wheel into place and tightening nuts with an air-powered wrench.

The two rear wheels were mounted. He rolled a new tire to the front axle. While lifting it into place he felt a sharp pain in his lower back.

“Crap.”

He managed to hang the wheel onto the five lug bolts before stepping away holding his back. He hadn't been wearing the back brace. That was a shop rule for any tire work because the wheels and tires were heavy. He could be fired for getting hurt by violating a safety rule. Trying to conceal his discomfort, he casually strolled over to the bench, picked up the back brace, and fastened it tightly around his waist. He'd just have to work hurt. Gingerly he returned to the car and finished mounting the new tire on the passenger side. One tire remaining.

He could feel the back spasms increase now. With difficulty he rolled the fourth tire to the driver's side of the front axle. How was he going to lift it into place? He couldn't ask anyone for help for fear they'd squeal on him with the shop manager. He squatted down, wrapped both arms around the tire, and lifted slowly, maintaining a straight back. The pain was excruciating. Standing now, he struggled to align the lug bolts to the holes in the wheel.

“Get in there, darn it!” Melvin growled under his breath.

At last, the wheel slipped onto the lug bolts and hung at an angle without Melvin having to hold it. A wave of nausea rose from his gut. He walked briskly across the garage to the men's room.

Melvin vomited into the toilet, which temporarily relieved his stomach, but the effort of bending over and retching aggravated his back. Twice he thought he was going to black out. Sharp pain radiated from the small of his back, and for a time he was convinced that he would not be able to stand without assistance. But he did stand, splashed cold water on his ashen face, unlocked the door, and walked carefully toward the waiting Mustang.

The physical part of the job was over. He only needed to secure the remaining lug nuts, lower the car, and drive it to the delivery staging area. The air wrench was on the floor requiring yet another agonizing bend to pick it up. With his head down, more cigar smoke wafted in from the open garage door, causing a surge of fresh nausea. He clenched his teeth and gripped the wrench.

*Jeez, don't puke. Not now, not here.*

Wrench in hand he stiffly stood to tighten each of the five lug nuts. The loud sound of the air wrench had never bothered Melvin before, but today it sounded like a thousand angry bees in each ear. One nut tight. Then two were tight. After the third lug nut was tight, Melvin was dizzy and sweat was running into his eyes. A two-minute job for this tire was taking him forever. Awkwardly he managed to position the wrench over the fourth lug nut and tighten it. One lug nut to go, then he could take a ten-minute break.

By hand, he turned the nut until it was flush with the wheel, readying it for the wrench.

“Hey, Bigsby, what's taking so long? That car has to be delivered in ninety minutes.”

Melvin's head was swirling as if he'd just stepped off a high-speed merry-go-round.

“Just finished, boss. I'll drive it out now,” Melvin said.

“Good. Check your tickets. You have two oil changes yet to do today. Hop to it.”

Melvin lowered the Mustang to the floor and drove it out of the Service area to the covered zone reserved for final check and detailing of cars before delivery.

Walking back to the garage he realized he'd have to skip his break in order to finish the oil changes by three. Two oil changes and then he could go home to bed. Maybe if he felt better later tonight he could head down to the Blue Moon.

## 2

Phobley, standing tall in a gray overcoat, pretended to look at the used Ford pickup in front of him, but his eyes, hidden by wraparound sunglasses, were locked on the yellow Mustang. He dropped a smoldering cigar to the pavement and squished it under a boot before walking away.

“Excuse me, sir, were you interested in that F-150? Only 82,000 miles, new battery,” said the approaching salesman.

“Not really. I'm not a truck guy. I prefer something ... let's say ... a bit more fiery ... more sporty.”

“Certainly. Did you have something in mind?”

“That's a very striking car over there,” Phobley said, pointing with long gray fingers at the saffron yellow Mustang hatchback.

“Yes, it is. That's a gas model. We don't have any in stock, but I can order one from the factory, configured just the way you want it.”

“Oh, I like gasoline. I prefer the ... explosive power ... of a ... gasoline engine.”

“Yes, sir, I know what you mean.”

“Oh, I doubt that, but tell me, is it standard procedure to deliver a new car with a full tank of gas?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That's nice. So very, very thoughtful,” Phobley said.

## Chapter 8

### 1

[Reef Bay, Washington, the Austin home, June 2038]

Around 3:30, Clay's phone buzzed.

“This is Clay.”

“Mr. Austin, this is Leland from Monroe Coastal Ford. I'm at your gate.”

“Great. I was beginning to worry you wouldn't get here in time. I'll be there in a few minutes.”

Clay disconnected the call, dropped the phone into his pants pocket, and walked over to Sheryl, who was applying makeup in their bathroom. He leaned down to whisper in her ear.

“Charley's car has been delivered. Should I drive it down now from the gate?”

After thinking for a moment, Sheryl replied, “Why don't you back it into the driveway and park it just inside the gate. He won't see it until we're on our way to the ceremony. He can take it from there.”

“Great idea. I better run up the hill to the gate before Charley comes downstairs.”



Clay kissed Sheryl before slipping quietly out of the master suite and through the front door. He briskly walked up the curving drive that snaked through windswept cedars to the electronic gate.

“Hi, Leland. Thanks again for delivering the car this afternoon.”

“My pleasure, Mr. Austin. Anytime. Just sign the delivery receipt and the car is all yours.”

Clay scribbled his signature on the document before accepting two sets of key fobs from the salesman.

“The manual is in the glove box. And the tank is full.”

“Thanks, Leland.”

“Can I ask who selected the custom wheels? I don’t recall seeing anything like them.”

“That would be my wife. Twenty years married, and I didn’t know she had an eye for car wheels. ... She selected the paint color, too.”

“Well, the combination is hot, really hot.”

“Thanks. Listen, I have to get going – it’s about time for us to leave.”

“Of course. Don’t hesitate to call if you have any questions about the car.”

“I have your card. Nice doing business with you, Leland.”

Clay watched as Leland climbed into a waiting service truck and headed down Deception Point Drive.

The Mustang was amazing all right. The metallic saffron yellow paint lit up the gray day with its brilliant glow. The custom wheels somehow made the muscle car look classy and fast at the same time. It was a far stretch from his first car, a black, slant-six Dodge sedan that looked like it belonged in the driveway of a librarian.

In truth, Charley would have been thrilled with anything – a used truck or a compact – but Clay and Sheryl had promised him a special gift if he made Honor Roll and received a scholarship. He was a good kid who, they believed, could handle the responsibility of such an extravagant gift.

Clay slipped behind the wheel and pushed the Start button. The engine’s refined growl made him smile. *Just enough attitude without being obnoxious.* He swung the car around before backing it through the gate and turning off the engine. A part of him wanted to take the Mustang for a spin all by himself, but time was short. He reluctantly turned his back on the shining car and walked briskly back to the house in a fresh drizzle. The gray afternoon grew dimmer.

He managed to slip back into the house and the master bedroom on the ground floor without Charley knowing he had gone.

“All set,” Clay said to his wife.

“Is it pretty?” Sheryl asked.

“It’s not ‘pretty.’ It’s a hot-looking muscle car ... I might have to get me one.”

“Aren’t you a little old for a Mustang?” Sheryl teased.

“Ouch.”

“Hey, look what time it is. And you’d better change that shirt – it’s damp. Is it raining already?”

“Yeah, started to drizzle.”

“Finish dressing and I’ll drag Charley out of his room.”

Ten minutes later, all three Austins were grouped in the living room, smiling and talking, as a small drone with a camera circled them again and again.

“Enough video, we gotta roll,” Clay said.

Sheryl landed the drone on the floor and turned it off. There were tears in her eyes.

“Mom, what are crying about?”

“My little boy is all grown up,” Sheryl said.

Charley hugged his mother. “Careful, Mom, don’t streak your makeup. We don’t have time for you to fix it.” The words were practical, but the tone was loving. He was a typical eighteen-year-old teenager in so many ways, but he had a soft heart.

“Hey, I’m heading to the car. Get a move on, you two,” Clay said while looking at his watch.

Clay slowly drove the gas-powered BMW up the drive. He and Sheryl shared a quick, knowing glance as the car approached the last bend in the driveway before the gate would come into view. Clay looked in the rearview mirror at his son. Charley was head down totally engaged with his cell phone, thumbs rapidly tapping messages.

Still watching Charley in the mirror, Clay pulled up behind the parked Mustang and stopped. Charley was still tapping one message after another.

When Charley still didn’t look up, Clay shouted, “For crying out loud, who blocked the driveway?”

Charley looked up, annoyed that his messaging had been interrupted. Clay, being the thespian, angrily got out of the car and walked to the passenger side of the Mustang.

“Honey,” Sheryl said, turning to Charley, “Why don’t you help your father? Maybe it’s one of your friends in the car.”

“Okay, I guess.”

He left the back seat and walked uneasily toward the Mustang on the driver’s side.

“There’s nobody in it? Anyone you know drive a new, gas Mustang?” Clay said.

“No, are you kidding, everyone drives EVs?”

“Hey, check to see if the door is open. Maybe we can push it out of the way or something,” Clay said.

Charley tried the door.

“Nope, it’s locked.”

“Darn it. Hey, try this.” Clay tossed a keyless fob over the car to his son.

Charley grabbed the key out of the air with one hand and stood looking at it.

“Well, push the button. Unlock your car, son,” Clay said.

“What? No way! This is mine?”

“It certainly is,” Sheryl said, walking up to her son and giving him a hug. Happy graduation, sweetheart.”

“It’s awesome,” Charley said.

“And it’s powerful – a lot more horsepower than you’re used to driving, so take it easy,” Clay said.

“I will.”

“You better be. You get one ticket, mister, and you can kiss the car goodbye. Got that straight?” Sheryl said.

“Yes.”

“All right, everyone, let’s get going. Charley, we’ll follow you to the high school. Remember, afterwards we’re meeting at the restaurant for dinner. Don’t be late,” Clay said.

“Right ... oh, man this is so awesome. Thank you, Mom and Dad. Thank you.” Charley folded his six-foot-two frame into the driver’s seat, started the engine, made adjustments to the seat and mirrors, and drove away, twin exhausts snarling into the stillness of the gray afternoon.

[Chapters 3-5 and 9-58 have been removed ifrom this sample. The full version is available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) ]

## Books by Charles Besondy

The following books are in the Lighthouse Series. Each is a standalone work of Christian fiction; however, I suggest the best reading experience may be had by reading the books in the order below. Books are available on Amazon.com.

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### *The Hidden Saboteur* A Christian Psychological Thriller

**Clay Austin’s Career Was Taking Off.  
Then the Nightmares Took Over.**

(Two-time literary award winner for Christian fiction, 2020)

Dare to venture inside the head and life of a man caught in a spiritual battle.

No place is safe for Clay. He is besieged. Voices from the past haunt his Seattle houseboat. Demonic machines attack him on the street and in his dreams. Clay becomes a confused, weakened man fighting a losing battle for the very essence of who he is.

Then God’s plan for Clay goes into overdrive. The spiritual battle is on.

He and the one woman who loves him are drawn by events to a small town on the Washington coast where the final showdown between God and the Deceiver will seal Clay's fate.

From the rain-drenched streets of Seattle, across the dry plains of Texas and back to the wind-swept bluffs of the rugged Washington coast, Clay experiences the hidden destructive power of the Deceiver, and the light of God's love flowing through those around him. Which force will prevail in the final showdown?

*The Hidden Saboteur* is the first major novel in the Lighthouse Series by Charles Besondy.

### *The Chase*

#### A Christian Psychological Thriller

#### **An Ordinary Girl Becomes an Extraordinary Woman Just One Step from Destruction**

(Two-time literary award winner for Christian fiction, 2021)

What Sheryl remembered most about her life before marrying Clay Austin was the cycle of chaos – brief moments of happiness soon snuffed out by despair – again and again and again.

She thought those days were behind her. She had strong faith, a wonderful husband, and a baby in her womb. So, why were dark thoughts flooding her mind now? Why was she walking to the cliff in the dead of night? Why was a tall, lanky stranger intensely studying her from the darkness?

This epic thriller in the Clay Austin series follows the twisting, turning journey of Sheryl Landing as she struggles to rebound from an oppressed childhood in search of herself and love.

Along the way she meets Yawl, a beautiful bird with golden eyes who opens her heart to God. Then one night in prayer she hears a clear voice tell her, "Protect Clay; bring him to me."

But even as she begins to let the hand of God guide her, an evil power delights in planning her ruin. During her journey Sheryl stumbles, regains her way, falls again, and ultimately is brought to the brink of destruction.

*The Chase* answers the question: To what length will God go to protect us from evil? And to what extent will the Deceiver go to lure us away from the Light?

Set in modern-day Washington State, *The Chase* draws the reader close to its characters, paints vivid scenes, uplifts with faith, and thrills with suspense.

The novel by Charles Besondy is the second major novel in the Lighthouse Series.

### *The Snare*

#### A Christian Psychological Thriller

### **The Deceiver’s Plan is Working. Is it too Late for Charley Austin and the World?**

In the small coastal town of Reef Bay, Washington, Charley Austin is graduating from high school.

He has no way of knowing that his life will be hell for the next nine months.

All because he is a pet project of Phobley, a dark angel, whose goal is to destroy the boy – not to kill him physically, but to destroy his faith. And for that purpose, Phobley has a sinister and seductive plan.

The reader might recognize Charley, the eighteen-year-old son of Clay and Sheryl Austin. He is like so many young people who, searching for meaning, succumb to the shiny promises of culture and politics.

It’s 2038 in Reef Bay, but the story reads like today’s evening news, as Charley, made bitter by tragedy, becomes enchanted by a woman, and is swept up in a political movement that threatens his very freedom.

*The Snare* addresses the question: Could socialism be Satan’s final and strongest deception? And what is God’s response?

The Snare is the third major novel in the Lighthouse Series by multi-award-winning author Charles Besondy. It was written to be enjoyed fully without reading the two preceding novels, *The Hidden Saboteur* and *The Chase*.

The story takes place between June 2038 and December 2039 (with one detour to 1947). The action occurs in western Washington and Oregon (with a few detours to the foothills outside Roswell, New Mexico).

### *All for Clay* A Christian Fiction Novella and Prequel to *The Hidden Saboteur*

### **When a Mother’s Best Intentions Go Wrong, Will She Be Forgiven?**

Elizabeth is a divorced mother whose little boy needs a father. In her quest to find a good man for both of them her decisions shape and scar both of their lives forever.

Elizabeth was raised in a dysfunctional family with an absent father. Now in her late twenties, living in a small Oregon town, she finds herself in the same sad situation as her mother. She vows to do better. She makes a plan.

All for Clay is the story of a mother’s soul-searching dedication and sacrifice for the son she loves more than life itself. But her second marriage goes badly wrong from the start. Can she forgive herself? Will Clay ever forgive her?

*All for Clay* is a work of fiction within Charles Besondy's Lighthouse Series, headlined by the Christian psychological thriller *The Hidden Saboteur*.

*Painting for a Stranger*

A Christian Fiction Short Story and Side-Story to *The Hidden Saboteur*

**Who Controls Our Life?  
Why Do We Meet Who We Meet?**

What If someone you had never met was creating a painting that tells your life story, including the future?

The Stories Gallery in Seattle contained such a diverse collection of paintings that visitors didn't believe they were all created by the same artist – Wayne Gee.

Why was the occasional visitor to the gallery or to Gee's booth at a street fair so drawn to one painting or the other they couldn't resist buying it? What power did these paintings possess?

In this short story, Besondy gives us the background of the mysterious painting given to Clay Austin in *The Hidden Saboteur*. Even readers not familiar with Besondy's novel will enjoy this thought-provoking allegory.