

Laurie Garvey hadn't been raised to believe in the Rapture. She hadn't been raised to believe in much of anything, except the foolishness of belief itself.

*We're agnostics*, she used to tell her kids, back when they were little and needed a way to define themselves to their Catholic and Jewish and Unitarian friends. *We don't know if there's a God, and nobody else does, either. They might say they do, but they really don't.*

The first time she'd heard about the Rapture, she was a freshman in college, taking a class called Intro to World Religions. The phenomenon the professor described seemed like a joke to her, hordes of Christians floating out of their clothes, rising up through the roofs of their houses and cars to meet Jesus in the sky, everyone else standing around with their mouths hanging open, wondering where all the good people had gone. The theology remained murky to her, even after she read the section on "Premillennial Dispensationalism" in her textbook, all that mumbo jumbo about Armageddon and the Antichrist and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It felt like religious kitsch, as tacky as a black velvet painting, the kind of fantasy that appealed to people who ate too much fried food, spanked their kids, and had no problem with the theory that their loving God invented AIDS to punish the gays. Every once in a while, in the years that followed, she'd spot someone reading one of the *Left Behind* books in an airport or on a train, and feel a twinge of pity, and even a little bit of tenderness, for the poor sucker who had nothing better

to read, and nothing else to do, except sit around dreaming about the end of the world.

And then it happened. The biblical prophecy came true, or at least partly true. People disappeared, millions of them at the same time, all over the world. This wasn't some ancient rumor—a dead man coming back to life during the Roman Empire—or a dusty homegrown legend, Joseph Smith unearthing golden tablets in upstate New York, conversing with an angel. This was real. The Rapture happened in her own hometown, to her best friend's daughter, among others, while Laurie herself was in the house. God's intrusion into her life couldn't have been any clearer if He'd addressed her from a burning azalea.