



William Miller

# Day-Dawn

A New Hampshire couple is divided and drawn together by the Midnight Cry and Great Disappointment.

*(A tidy, unassuming house in a small town in New Hampshire. Cora, in her mid-20s, and Forrest, in his early 30s—a comfortably married couple—are talking)*

**Forrest:** Well, the great day has finally come, hasn't it?

**Cora:** *(Warning, almost playful. She is used to this sort of go around)* Now Forrest, don't start.

**Forrest:** Seems like any other day to me.

**Cora:** *(Triumphant)* Now that doesn't prove anything, and you

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know it. The Bible says he'll come like a thief in the night.

**Forrest:** Well, there you are. What sort of thief is going to come when there's a meeting room of saints waiting up for him?

**Cora:** *(Looking at him with a mixture of fondness and regret)* Do you know, sometimes I think you're hopeless.

**Forrest:** I'm a God-fearing man, Cora. I told you, if the Lord comes down for me, I will very willingly accompany him up again. I've got nothing against being a citizen of heaven.

**Cora:** *(Suddenly animated, fervent)* Then come with us, Forrest—come wait with us at the meeting! What could it hurt for you to come with us just this once?

**Forrest:** *(Shaking his head)* I suppose it wouldn't hurt, but what good would it do? That's what I want to know. If the Lord comes,

he comes, and he'll take us with him. If he doesn't, there's no point losing sleep at an all-night prayer meeting. I'll just have to go to work in the morning.

**Cora:** *(Earnestly)* But Forrest, you have to have *faith*. You have to believe he's coming, or you'll be left behind.

**Forrest:** *(Unmoved)* He made me, didn't he? Why wouldn't he take me home?

**Cora:** Because . . . *(almost afraid to say it)* because you might not be—*prepared*.

**Forrest:** Because I won't go to the meetings with you. *(It is not a question)*

**Cora:** Well . . .

**Forrest:** *(With slow-building anger)* That's it, isn't it? You think heaven will only have those built to sit and think for hours at a time. The rest of us restless ones who

can't sit more than a few minutes without cracking our knuckles, we'll just have to set up camp by the lake of fire.

**Cora:** (*Nervous*) Now Forrest, I didn't say . . .

**Forrest:** No, and you didn't have to. There's an awfully self-righteous tone to all those meetings, and don't think it doesn't show. Well, go ahead. Go with your people and get ready for your long journey. I'll stay here and do something *worldly*—maybe try to figure how to get us out of debt. If anyone asks where my wife is, I'll tell them she didn't really leave me—just took off for heaven.

**Cora:** (*With quiet dignity, but obviously hurt*) I'm sorry, Forrest.

**Forrest:** (*Not finished yet*) And maybe while you're there, you can point out to the Lord that, evil as your husband may be, he does have *one* virtue.

**Cora:** (*Still hurt, her mind elsewhere*) And what is that?

**Forrest:** (*Sarcastic*) Can't think of it, eh? Well, it's a good thing I brought it up or the Lord might have overlooked it, too. (*Loudly*) I'm against slavery, Cora, remember? That was one of your causes I was all *for*. I even hid some slaves in our big oven. I saved lives!

**Cora:** (*Quietly*) You've done many wonderful things, Forrest, and I'm sorry I made you angry. (*Forrest is quiet, almost abject, wondering if perhaps he has overreacted, but not yet ready to apologize. Cora continues, half to herself*) It's just that . . . that I so want for you to go with me. If I could only be sure that you were—*prepared*.

**Forrest:** (*He is immediately angry*)

*again, almost shouting*) Prepared! Prepared! I'll tell you what I'm not prepared for. I'm not *prepared* to give up on all my investments and sell everything just to pay off our debts. I'm not *prepared* to go off with you on this . . . this *goose-chase*—going off to wait for the end of the world, for . . . for the Lord to come down out of the sky like some magician's sideshow. I'm a grown man, Cora. Now leave me be.

**Cora:** (*She looks at him for a long moment, and begins to cry*) I'll never see you again, Forrest.

*(The suddenness of her statement catches him off guard, and he turns away from her, shaking his head)*

**Cora:** (*Crying harder*) I'll never see you. . . . I can't . . . I don't know if I can . . . (*Sobs choke her, and she covers her face*)

*(He comes to her hesitantly, and touches her arm. She puts her arms around him. They stand for a moment, then a knock sounds on the door)*

**Cora:** (*Pulling away from him, wiping her eyes.*) That's Josephine. I . . . I have to get my things. I have to go. (*She rushes around the room, snatching up clothing, as though trying to escape the pain of leaving. Another knock sounds, and finally there is nothing more for her to do. She stops and takes one last look at Forrest*) Good-by, Forrest.

**Forrest:** (*Quietly*) Good-by, Cora.

*(The door swings open and shut and she is gone.)*

*Time passes. We see Forrest pace the room in agitation, finally going to the pantry and rummaging for something. He returns with a bottle, and pours himself a drink.*

*Some time later, a neighbor stops by. His voice is indistinct, but we see him gesturing around the house. It becomes clear that he wants to buy it. The two men sit at the dining room table and draw up a contract. Forrest signs, and the neighbor leaves. Forrest raises his glass in a silent salute.*

*Much later. The sun has risen, and we see Cora returning slowly, stumblingly. Reaching the house, she finds the door locked and knocks. Forrest answers, obviously drunk)*

**Forrest:** (*Loud, his voice slurred*) Who's there? Who's there? (*Bawling*) Answer!

**Cora:** It's your wife, dear; please open the door.

**Forrest:** (*Decided, shaking his head*) Not my wife. Can't be.

**Cora:** (*Urgent*) But it is, Forrest. It's me, Cora. Please let me in.

**Forrest:** Not my wife, no. My wife's a Millerite. She's gone up. (*He*)

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**Cora:** *It's your wife, dear; please open the door.*

**Forrest:** *Not my wife, no. My wife's a Millerite. She's gone up. Up, with all the other saints. Mostly going to have a time up there . . .*

*points heavenward, then loses his balance and sits down abruptly*) Up, with all the other saints. Mostly men saints. They're going to have a time up there, but nothing bad. Oh no, 'cause in heaven they don't marry or nothing. They just desert their lawful wedded husbands.

**Cora:** Forrest, please let me in. The neighbors will hear.

**Forrest:** Neighbors have all gone up, too. I, only I am left. I'm a sinner, Cora—a hopeless sinner. *(Long pause)* Cora?

**Cora:** Yes?

**Forrest:** Cora, I'm drunk.

**Cora:** *(Resigned)* I know, Forrest.

**Forrest:** A whole bottle, Cora, I drank a whole bottle of liquor, and smoked three cigars, and played cards all by myself, and—and . . .

**Cora:** *(Listlessly)* And what else, Forrest?

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**Cora:** *I feel so—stopped. Like I've forgotten how to live. What do we do now, Forrest? What do I do?*

**Forrest:** *If you loved him enough to go to live with him forever, you ought to trust him just a little bit now.*

**Forrest:** *(Puzzled)* Nothing else. Haven't had time for anything else. *(She sighs)* Yet. But I will, don't worry. Tomorrow I'm going out and buy me a slave!

**Cora:** *(Horried)* Forrest!

**Forrest:** 's true, I am. And then I'm going to find me a woman, one who won't be leaving me, off to meetings and praying and going to heaven all the time. Cora, what do you think I am, dead? I need you. I need you. *(He opens the door)*

**Cora:** *(With despair, as the reality of situation begins to sink in)* I need you, too, Forrest. We need each other. *(She reaches out for him. Forrest sways and passes out, falling away from her, stretched out on the floor)* Forrest? Forrest! *(He begins to snore)*

*(Later. The lighting shifts, and the sun slanting through the windows suggests that it is mid-afternoon. Forrest is still lying on the floor. Cora is curled up on the couch, sleeping, her coat over her. Forrest wakes up slowly, stands up, staggers, clutches at his head. Finally he notices Cora on the couch)*

**Forrest:** *(Puzzled)* Cora? What's she doing in the parlor? *(Goes to the grandfather clock and looks at the time. Starts to remember)* Oh, God. Poor Cora! *(Remembering the morning)* What did I say to her? What did I do?

**Cora:** *(Waking up, blinking against the light)* Where . . . where am I? Forrest? *(He goes to her. She realizes where she is. Despondently)* Oh.

**Forrest:** He didn't come.

**Cora:** No.

**Forrest:** *(Teasing her just a bit,*

*trying to stir her up)* Well, there's always tomorrow.

**Cora:** *(Forlorn)* Yes, there's tomorrow.

**Forrest:** *(Gently, a little unsettled by her despondence)* You said Miller warned against being so sure.

**Cora:** I know, I know. But when you want something so *badly* . . . *(She slumps visibly)* I feel so—stopped. Like I've forgotten how to live. What do we do now, Forrest? What do I do?

**Forrest:** *(Carefully)* If you loved him enough to go to live with him forever, you ought to trust him just a little bit now. *(He glances at her sideways, trying to gauge her reaction. She nods. He continues)* You Adventists may just have to admit that maybe you haven't quite read the Almighty's full meaning on this, that's all. He knows everything, Cora—isn't that what you believe? How can one of us humans, or even a group together, know what's in his mind? He made us—it's not likely our brains are bigger than his.

**Cora:** *(Resigned)* You're right, of course.

**Forrest:** *(Long pause. Then, very cautiously, almost holding his breath)* There is one thing that might make you happy.

**Cora:** *(Not too optimistic)* What?

**Forrest:** Well, you know how you wanted me to sell the house and pay off all the creditors? *(Her eyes begin to widen and he rushes on)* Well, look here. *(He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a roll of bills)*

**Cora:** *(Gasps)* Forrest, no! You sold our house?

**Forrest:** (*Nervous, fidgeting*) Well, I didn't really figure the world would end, but I thought it might make you happy, anyway, and besides, we could pay off our debts and . . . er, well, get started again.

**Cora:** (*A bit dazed*) When do we have to move our things?

**Forrest:** (*Nervously*) Well . . . (*Panicky laugh*) that's another good thing about it. We won't have to move anything.

**Cora:** (*Still dazed*) You sold our furniture, too? (*He nods*) Well. (*Again*) Well. (*Starting to snap out of it*) But Forrest, where will we live?

**Forrest:** A . . . um, well, a boarding house, I thought. (*Plunging ahead*) Just listen, Cora, it's for the best. Think of it. There'll be no more creditors at the door, and in no time I'll start getting returns on my investments. We'll have our own house again, and better than this, before you know it.

**Cora:** (*Almost bitter*) I wish I could believe that. You're going to invest in that bathtub, aren't you? That

one no one will ever buy?

**Forrest:** (*Firmly*) Cora, if you lose faith in the Lord, I can stand it, but you've got to have some faith in me. Do you think it was easy for me to sell the house that we've both worked so hard for? But that is what you asked me to do. Now you've got to believe in me, just a little at least. I know I'm taking a chance, but I want to see what I can do, maybe as much as you wanted to go up to those pearly gates. I think the Lord understands that, Cora, and I wish you'd at least try.

**Cora:** (*Softening*) I believe in you, Forrest; it's those pedal showers and electrified bathtubs that worry me.

**Forrest:** (*Fervent*) That's because you're not an investor, like me. When I see a peddle shower, I don't see just one. I see hundreds of them, all with happy people inside, pedaling away. And I see them thanking me for bringing them such a wonderful invention. It may still sell. And this bathtub, it may go very well. They say they've had some dramatic successes in Europe. They've just got to tinker with it a little more.

**Cora:** (*Softly, resigning herself to the idea.*) We're going to be in that boarding house for a long time, aren't we? (*He shrugs and tries a hopeful smile*) Well, I guess I could take in a little work— (*Her optimism and energy are starting to take over, and she begins to gather herself against the years ahead*) I can teach fine stitching, or maybe even French—put that fancy education I got to use.

**Forrest:** (*Beginning to glow*) That's it, Cora. That's all I need. Things will be different now, I know it. Say—I'm starved. Let's go buy a dinner at the Endicott Hotel. We're debt free. We'll celebrate. (*He looks down at himself, sees his rumpled clothes*) You just wait while I change. I won't be a minute. (*He bounds up the stairs*)

(*The early winter sun is beginning to set, filling the room with a soft, orange light. Cora stands quietly, taking in the scene. Then she turns to the sofa and picks up her coat, preparing to go out*)

**Cora:** (*Softly, to herself*) Well, there's always tomorrow. (*Even more quietly*) Always tomorrow.