

PROLOGUE

GOD ON THE YUKON RIVER

Friday, June 21, 1991

11:58 p.m. Alaska Daylight Time

On the Yukon River 50 miles south of the Arctic Circle

Even an old landlubber like me knows better than to stand up in a boat, thought Lute Jonson, especially this decrepit canoe. But as exhilaration flooded his mind and drowned his good sense, he raised himself carefully in the bow, and stood with his legs spread as far as the canoe's ribs allowed.

"Oh, my God," he whispered.

His companion's voice cracked the stillness from the back of the small boat. "Is not Alaska in June more beautiful than anywhere else on earth?"

Lute stared north up a stretch of the quarter-mile-wide Yukon. He lifted his gaze slightly from the river's cold clear surface to a perfect Midnight Sun, just beginning to skim the flat and treeless horizon, ready to rise seamlessly into dawn within minutes. The blended blaze of orange-red sky raised gooseflesh all over his skin. His arms elevated until they were straight out, palms facing the sun in an unselfconscious embrace of the pristine landscape before him. He breathed in pure river air.

"Oh, my God," Lute prayed again, this time with a soft voice that broke the silence. "You have safely guided me into Your wilderness. You have let me taste this perfect peace, prepared me to reveal Your astounding news tomorrow, steeled me for the reactions of a billion Christians who'll be shocked by this final Dead Sea Scrolls secret."

Arms open wide, eyes fixed on the horizon's extraordinary solar event, lungs full of unspoiled oxygen, Lute was startled by his companion's words, especially the unmistakable anguish in their tone: "God forgive me for this." The click of a revolver cocking completed the meaning.

Lute's arms chilled instantly. *Oh Lord God, NO! This is Your answer?! This is how it ends?*

