



Issue #6

Pure in Heart

A Literary Magazine for Families



November 2023





Pure in Heart Stories

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Issue #6 | November 2023

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Pure in Heart Stories

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Cover Art: *Salt & Light* by Jeff Johnson (page 71).

Image on pg. 1: Boat Artwork by Shayna Miller (page 53).

HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Use the color tabs to find the recommended age group for each poem and story. Everything in this issue is family-friendly, but the tabs are a guide for what age group might appreciate a poem or story best.






-  = Ages 6+
-  = Ages 8+
-  = Ages 10+
-  = Ages 12+

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Letter from the Editors



Welcome to our 6th issue of Pure in Heart!

While I love all of our past issues, I must admit this is my favorite issue so far (shh, don't tell the others!) mostly because we received so many awesome submissions from younger writers and artists. I love the creative spirit of children and teenagers, and I pray that these kids never lose their love for poetry, storytelling, and art as they grow older. We were also blessed to receive work from seasoned writers and artists, and I think it may be one of our more visually stunning and engaging issues thus far. We hope you and your family enjoy it as much as we do.

In these pages, you'll find whispers of autumn, light touches of Christmas here and there, and poetic explorations of God's creatures. You'll find exciting stories with battles of faith, time travel, romance, and simple reminders of the power of Jesus' love and the importance of doing the right thing. There's a delicious, chocolatey recipe to ring in the Christmas season, comics, and more surprises we hope you'll enjoy. This issue truly has something for everyone.

Thank you for reading!

May God bless you and keep you,

Veronica McDonald

& Mia McDonald

Editors of *Pure in Heart Stories*

The Life of Goats



by Ruby Grace Guerrero, age 13

Goats are wonders!

If I do say ...

they could be tall, short, brown or gray!

Every goat is different in their own unique way!

They bite and chew what they see eye-to-eye.

Oh, what could be more troubling
than these animals in my life?



Photo by Ruby Grace Guerrero.

Autumn Leaves



by Elizabeth Wrobel

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh

Autumn leaves get a friendly push.

Whir, whir, whir

Colored leaves swirl and stir.

Scrunch, scrunch, scrunch

Fallen leaves, between feet and ground they crunch.

Scratch, scratch, scratch

Raking golden leaves across the grass.

Swish, swish, swish

Piling autumn leaves until I just can't resist.

Splash, splash, splash

Into a soft pile of leaves, I gently crash.

Splatter, splatter, splatter

Across the empty yard, those colored leaves scatter.

Scratch, scratch, scratch

I try again raking golden leaves across the grass.



About the Poet

Elizabeth Wrobel writes for both kids and adults in the Northwoods of Michigan. She's been published in books, magazines, e-zines, and online. Her latest poems have been published in *Pure in Heart Stories* and *The Dirigible Balloon*. When she's not writing, she's reading and spending time with family.

Bees



by Phoebe Hernandez, age 11



Yellow and black stripes
with big round eyes
they crawl on you with
six little legs; tell me, people
you aren't a big fan of bees

Flowers

by Phoebe Hernandez, age 11



A PUPPY



by **Elizabeth Wrobel**

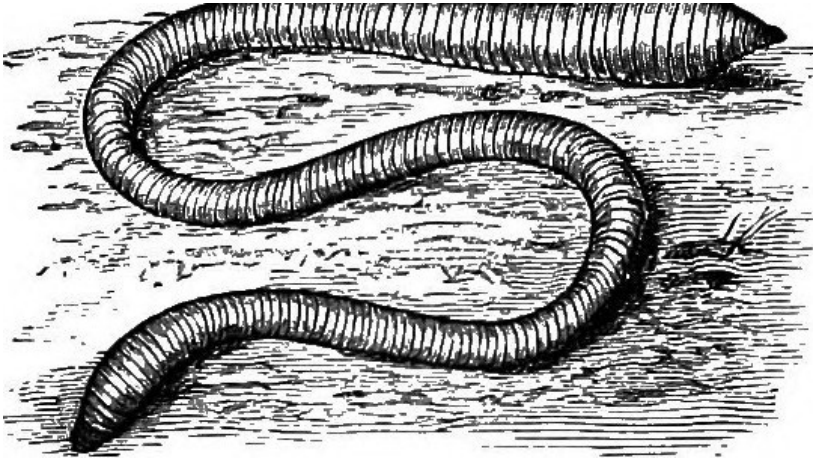
A wagging tail, a playful stance,
A furry friend, an empty lap.
A pink tongue, a tiny lick,
A wet nose, a slobbery kiss.
A walk in the park, a walk down the street,
Another adorable puppy, a new friend to meet.
A game, a stick,
Throw it, fetch it.
A bowl of water, a special treat,
Curling up for the night at my feet.



Wormy Day



by Fernando Guerrero, age 12



Worms live underground

In the dirt that is very brown

It'd be very weird if they could fly

Even though they don't have eyes

Then when it rains all that brown goes around

Lessons from Grandma



by Nila K. Bartley

The wonderful smells would draw us back inside
 To grandma's house, where those smells would make our mouths water
 And make us decide
 To see where all those wonderful smells were coming from.
 Grandma was always cooking up something so tasty
 That we would fight over every crumb.
 Beef stew with peach cobbler—only grandma could cook so good.
 She would always lead us in prayer before the meal,
 That was understood.
 Grandma's prayer was even better than her meal.
 She would reach for our hands
 As she would kneel.
 She would talk to God like He was her friend.
 Grandma would tell us there was no hurt
 The Lord cannot mend.
 We would go to sleep that night in Grandma's house, feeling safe and sound.
 She would always tell us
 Angels are all around
 To watch over us while we sleep.
 Grandma would always tell us
 In our hearts the Lord we should keep.
 My sister and I are a little older now, and because of Grandma and others
 Jesus is in our hearts still.
 We just want to do the Lord's will.



About the Poet

Nila is in her late fifties and lives in southern Ohio, USA. She is married to her forever love, Jason. Nila volunteers at her church and was the teacher of the Ladies' Sunday School class for three years. She considers her writing ability to be a talent from the Lord and serves him with her writing. Nila derives joy from this and hopes people are blessed by her short stories and poems.

The Common Cold

by Pat Severin



I've got a code,
A code in my dose.
I'm stuffy and sneezing ...
This is it, I suppose.

I'm coughing, my head hurts.
I'm really a mess.
I'm feeling just rotten ...
The end's soon, I guess.

But don't call the doctor,
I'm sure it's too late.
He'll try to convince you
that I'll soon feel great.

He'll give me some syrup
That tastes simply awful.
Don't do it, I beg you.
What I need's a ... waffle

With sausage and juice and
Some jam, if you please.
I'll try to survive, Mom,
Until the next ... ah ... ahhh ... chooOOO, SNEEZE!



About the Poet

Pat Severin is a retired Christian school teacher who has always found inspiration for her poems from her faith and her love of people and children. She is currently published in the *Christian Magazines*, *The Agape Review*, *The Clay Jar Review*, and *The Way Back 2 Ourselves*. She has also been a featured poet in many of the Southern Arizona Press anthologies. Additionally, she is one of the contributors to the books *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *Perfectly Imperfect Rescues and Their Humans*. Her personal ministry is sending encouraging poems in her original cards to people going through difficult struggles.

The Chorus of the Ol' Gray Tail

by Chila Woychik

The big, old elm tree quivered and shook
 as his branches were tickled and teased.
 He dropped his guard and his leaves rattled off—
 by a cough—or maybe a sneeze.

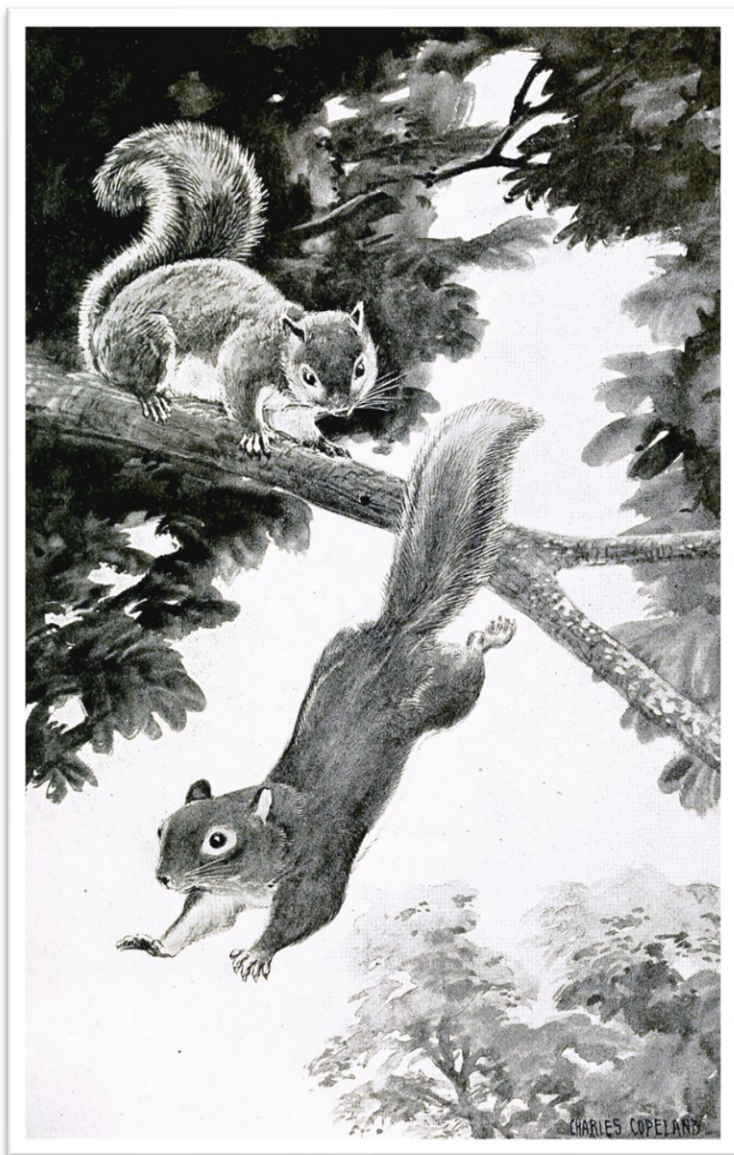
Winter brings colds, but it's warm today
 and Old Elm's as healthy as me:
 No, he didn't sneeze or cough as I supposed
 but trembled from the revelry.

Fall hasn't come, the winter's long past;
 the wind hasn't whipped up a gale.
 Let's listen carefully! We'll hear it at last—
 the Chorus of the Ol' Gray Tail.

A dozen choir members all singing their parts
 with Mister Furry Tail leading bass,
 And Chatter-Box Fluff seems to be Choir Master
 helping keep everyone in place.

Big Gray Mama coaches little ones at play
 —they're too young to join in yet.
 But the day will come when their learning is done
 and their choir parts will be set.

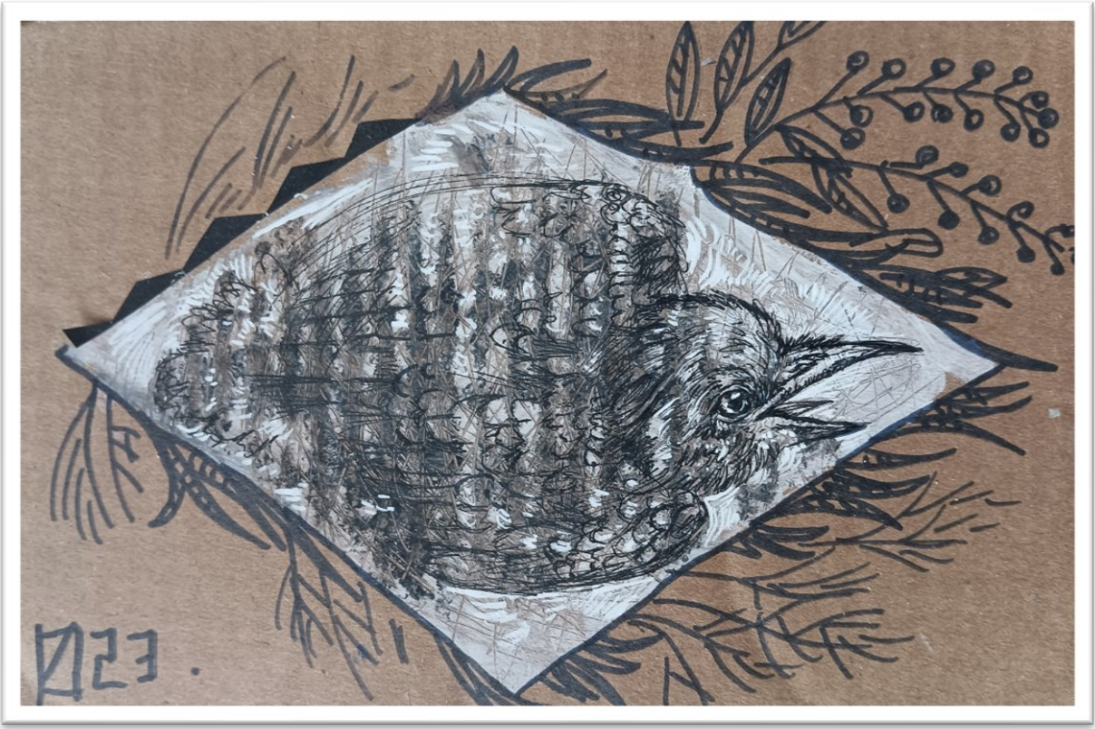
So the All Squirrel Chorus sings from tree to tree
 along that much-used Critter Trail.
 If they'll just sit still—what a choir that would be! —
 The Chorus of the Ol' Gray Tail.



About the Poet

Chila Woychik is originally from the beautiful land of Bavaria but has lived in the Midwest most of her life. She has been published in *Cimarron*, *Passages North*, and more, and has an essay collection, *Singing the Land: A Rural Chronology* (Shanti Arts, 2020). www.chilawoychik.com

Artwork
by Irina Tall (Novikova)



About the Artist

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The first personal exhibition, “My soul is like a wild hawk” (2002), was held in the Museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, and she especially likes the image of a man—a bird—Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week.

Duck



by Matthew Hernandez, age 13

- Ducks lay eggs
- Use bills to eat
- Catch fish and insects
- Keep their eggs safe
- Swim in the water



Drawing by Matthew Hernandez.

Snow Gear

by Pat Severin



Do I have to wear this snowsuit?
This scarf and all this stuff?
These boots, these socks, my hat & gloves ...
Say, when's enough, enough?

It takes forever just to dress,
And when at last I'm done,
I'm just so bundled up that I
Can't even walk or run!

I feel like a winter robot
As I wear Mom's good intentions.
Except for freezing eskimos,
These clothes *aren't* good inventions!



Our Snowman

by Pat Severin



Blistery, blustery, blizzardy day,
Snowing and blowing our snowman away.
Oh, how I wish, really wish, he could stay,
But it's such a blistery, blustery day.

We made him last Sunday, my sister and me.
He's standing right under our sycamore tree.
An old hat of Daddy's, a scarf from Aunt Fay ...
Please stop, you old blistery, blustery day!

Your winds whistle past him and pull at his hat.
Why must you keep howling and blowing like that?
The good packing snow helped us make him with ease,
So calm down you blizzardy winds, won't you, please?

Winter Memories



by Elizabeth Wrobel

A sparkling day in the snow
A proud man built in the meadow
A perfect angel looking up at me
A friendly fight filling everyone with glee
Hot cocoa waiting in a mug
Warm arms waiting for a hug
Ready to snuggle up together
Making winter memories that last forever.

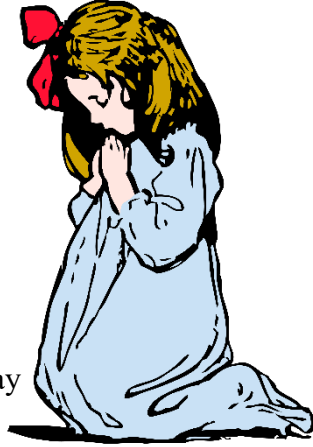


I Play a Part

by **Nila K. Bartley**



As I fold my hands to pray...
What may come of this day,
I have a choice,
Each of God's children has a voice.
I am important to God you see.
He loves me.
Jesus is true and faithful,
For this I am grateful.
For the choices I make today
Are either wrong or right, and will play
A part of God's kingdom plan—
God has one for each child, woman, and man.
I play a part in God's kingdom, too,
For God's plan to work through
To the end to show others God's love.
And that is why Jesus came from Heaven above,
That I may show others the way to Jesus, by the way I live.
My love I freely give.
God shows His love through me
So others may know why Jesus died upon that tree.



The Vine

by Camilla Yslas, age 9



At His Window

by Maureen Keating



The sun set softly
Across the Western sky.
The stars came out a-twinkling,
The moon floated high.
He sat at his window
Finished with his toys,
And tired of his study
Like any little boy.
He looked to the stars,
His mind was filled with peace.
Then he saw the brightest star
So for it, he reached.
It came down a-twinkling
With a million bright lights.
It lifted him high
And bore him away in the night.
It brought him to a place
Made up of his own mind.
It had what he wanted,
All of the finest kind:
A candy-laden table,

His room was very large.
At night he was a king,
By day a hockey star.
He didn't go to school,
He slept till ten o'clock.
He rode a ten-speed bike,
And he never had to walk.
The people in attendance
Were heroes of the best,
They bowed to his fancy
And never took a rest.
He lived all his thoughts,
He played with all his toys,
He ate up his fill,
Like any little boy.

Then one day he said it
While sitting on his throne,
"I've had lots of fun tonight and
Now I'm going home."
"Home?" they said, astonished.
At one another they stared.
Then one found his voice ...
"What on earth is there?"
"Here is a splendid place
To live my dreams with zeal,
But home is a special place
Mostly cause it's real."
Then he stretched his arm
And the star lifted him high.
It carried him away
Across the Western sky.
It brought him to his room.
He finished all his studies.
Then he went to sleep,

Thinking of his mommy.
The star left the sill, and
Stopped there in the sky,
It said ...
“Angels are shining bright tonight,
Such wisdom they won’t pass by.”

About the Poet

Maureen Keating was born in Toronto, ON in 1946. By profession, she has had the privilege and pleasure of working as a substitute teacher with a background in English and Visual Arts. Presently retired, Maureen continues to write poems and can be found published in *Time of Singing: A Journal of Christian Poetry* and an anthology, *Alchemy and Miracles*.

Tabitha's Carol

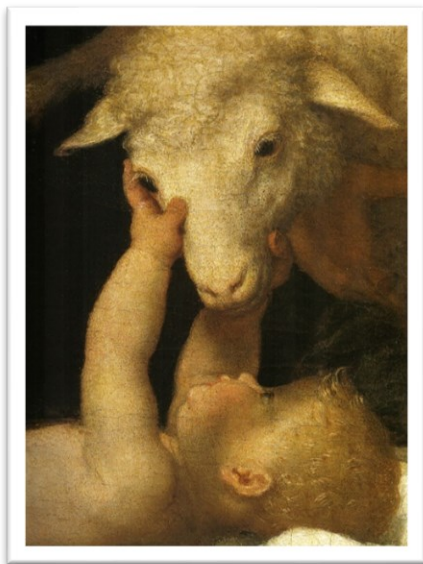


by **Bernard Pearson**

Across a burning Arabian Sky
A flock of weary sheep go by.
The men who were in charge of them
Have made their way to Bethlehem.

An angel now flies low on guard,
For when the journey gets too hard
His beating wings begin to cool the air
And warn the hungry beast beware.

Then as the lambs all begin to bleat
From underneath their mother's feet,
The angel sings a gentle lullaby,
For holy night is drawing nigh.



As the sheep have reached their field,
The truth at once can be revealed:
A baby born on that Christmas Eve,
The Messiah in whom all can believe.

When the shepherds returned in joy
From marveling at that little boy,
All knew that from that moment on
The light of love within them shone.

About the Poet

Bernard Pearson's work appears in over one hundred publications worldwide, including *Aesthetica Magazine* and *The Edinburgh Review*. In 2017, a selection of his poetry, 'In Free Fall,' was published by *Leaf by Leaf Press*. In 2019, he won second prize in The Aurora Prize (Poetry). He has also recently published two novels.

'Twas the Night Before Christmas

by Pat Severin



'Twas the night before Christmas ...

“You boys go to sleep!”

Mom said with a smile.

“Don’t anyone peek!”

It took all we had
Just to stay in our beds
As visions of presents
Danced in our heads.

“Tomorrow’s the day,”
I said to my brother,
Who whispered to me,
“I think I hear mother!”

So we laid very still
Pretending to sleep,
Neither one of us stirring,
Our secret to keep.

When finally we thought
That the coast was all clear,
Both of us whispered,
“Christmas day’s almost here!”

We did try to sleep
But we just couldn’t do it,
And a couple of times
We both almost blew it!



If my brother dozed off,
Then I would wake him.
But closer to morning,
I'd grab and I'd shake him

Till the morning arrived.
Must have been before sunup.
Then we ran downstairs
To see the house done up

In garland and tinsel
And bright, twinkling lights.
Mom and Dad put the tree up!
Must've done it last night!

And then we began
To examine the tags
Of all the presents
And the boxes and the bags.

Our Mom and Dad followed.
They sure looked worn out,
Both of them yawning and stretching,
But excited, no doubt!

Yes, this was the moment
We'd all waited for,
Tearing open the presents,
Wrappings covering the floor.

"You got me that wallet
I told you I liked!"
"I got you that map
From the place where we hiked."

But, then something strange
Became very clear.
This Christmas was different
Than even last year.

That is, I'd discovered
Something crazy but true:
That it's more fun to give
Than to get things from you.

Christmas time is just great
For my brother and me.
But the best part of Christmas
Is our family, the tree ...

And a day spent together.
And there's so much to do ...
But ... I'm really tired.
How about you?

Kitten



by Elijah Hong, age 11



Kitten.
Playful, mischievous,
Romping, cuddling, pouncing.
It plays in sunshine.
Slyboots.

The Village

by Elijah Hong, age 11

Busy streets line the empty sidewalks
While someone once in a while talks.
Cars silently line the narrow streets
As snow starts to fall in soft sheets.
Brick buildings stand straight and tall
Loudly echoing the dog's call.
Bye, small village, see you soon!
Keep the doors open and sing a merry tune.

Cooper Boy

by Pat Severin



I love our dog with love so deep
It's not like any other.
And not just me, our family,
My sister, Dad, and Mother.

But when our Cooper Boy got sick,
We didn't have a clue.
We wished that he could talk to us
And tell us what to do.

We tried so hard to figure out
The answer, the solution.
But when we took him to the vet,
No answers, more confusion.

It's been a week and still no change,
And all of us are so sad.
We're worried, don't know what to do,
Us kids and Mom and Dad.

Then yesterday he perked up some.

Hoped he was on his way
To getting better, and for sure,
So he and I could play.

My sister, me, my parents, too,
Thanked God for Cooper Boy.
We prayed to God to make him well,
For Cooper brings such joy!

Today, it's like a miracle!
My family's got a smile.
He's back to being Cooper Boy,
But, gee, it took a while!

I guess that pets are just like us
Because our pets get sick.
And when they do, we wish they could
Get over it real quick!

A Fish Story

by **Marcia N. Lynch**



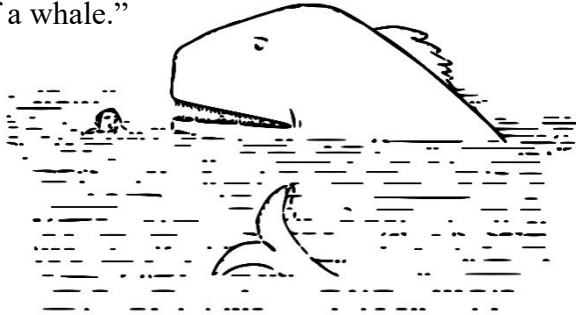
A whale went to a school of fish
To tell the tale of that strange dish
That caused his stomach such distress,
That left his insides in a mess,
Of seaweed and a strange addition,
A human man in desperation!
“I swallowed a man!” the whale proclaimed.
“Thrown overboard! By the crew disdained!
This hapless fellow left adrift
Among the loads of a cargo ship.
I saw the terror in his eyes!
And then, to my complete surprise,
I felt the urge to swallow him!
Down he went! He was quite slim.
But I got tickled by his hairy chin!
All the way, into the well,
Of the belly of a whale.”

“For three days he thrashed and gasped.
But I heard him pray at last.
He must have had a broken relation
With the God of his creation.
For his heart turned soft, I’d say,
He was sorry he’d run away
From his only Lord and friend.
But he found Him in the end.
So, in death, he would be well,
In the belly of a whale.”

“But my distress had gotten worse!
Human food is like a curse!

I had to find a sandy shore,
 And be relieved of what I bore.
 The town of Nineveh was within reach.
 I spit him out upon the beach.
 He looked quite well, for his condition,
 And grateful he'd escaped perdition!
 I sensed with God he would prevail
 From the belly of a whale."

"So, my fishes, now you've heard
 My strange story, every word.
 Try to remember, for I doubt
 My story's much to write about.
 Don't try to swim away from God.
 He's everywhere, in sea or sod.
 His love will draw you back to Him,
 No matter how far you try to swim!
 Trust in Him until the end,
 For He is your faithful friend.
 That little man should tell his tale
 From the belly of a whale."



About the Poet

Marcia N. Lynch's experience as a storyteller comes from working as a children's film editor and from having been written into the story of Christ's redemption. She studied sculpture at Mount Holyoke College. Sculpting, like film editing, requires an artist to cut out anything that does not relate to the primary subject matter, and these two disciplines have honed her storytelling skills. Marcia lives in Arlington, Virginia with her husband of 38 years and has three grown children. She surrendered to Christ in 1975.

Nighttime Butterfly



by Paul Kaddis, age 12

Butterfly, Butterfly, fly high. Show your colorful wings in the sky. Your thin wings flap quietly. Soothing sounds in the air, now you're here, now you're there. *Swish swash* goes your wings, you land on a flower while the breeze air whistles on you. The bright moon is out and shines on you. After a while, you prepare flight. *Drip drap* starts the rain. Your wings get wet, you fly away. I drift asleep and wake up to see a caterpillar on the wet leaves. Butterfly, Butterfly, goodbye



Snowy Day



by Paul Kaddis, age 12

The white snow,
Oh,
How you are a fluffy blanket to the ground!
The hot sun shines on you,
You don't seem to care.
A breeze comes through,
You don't seem to care.
Noises all around,
You don't seem to care.
I stomp and stomp,
It seems as if I am sinking,
You don't seem to care.
Oh, snow you are like a never ending road.
The next day it rains.
You freeze up.
You seem to care!

If Not for Light

by Charles Hughes

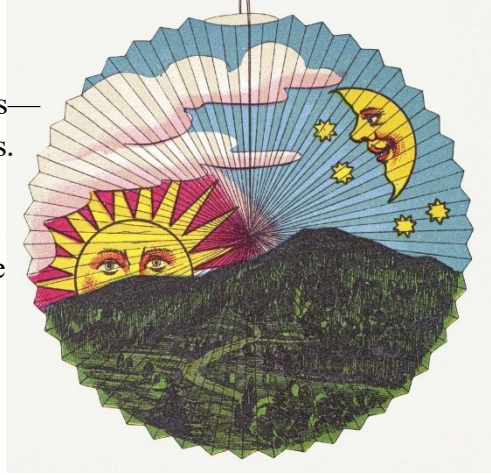


If not for light, the darkness
 Would cover all that is.
 Just think of the awful chaos—
 No, wait! Don't think of this.

Better instead to remember,
 When you can't help but see
 Darkness in every corner
 Advancing steadily

To cover you—remember
 God's love made all that is,
 And won't permit the darkness
 To cover up what's His.

Remember in the beginning,
 How nothing had begun
 Until God lit the darkness?
 Light came before the sun.



About the Poet

Charles Hughes has published two books of poems, *The Evening Sky* (2020) and *Cave Art* (2014), both from Wiseblood Books. He worked for over 30 years as a lawyer and lives in the Chicago area with his wife. He is lately writing poems for children.

A Little Peace of Heaven
by Lauren Murray



But People Used to Be

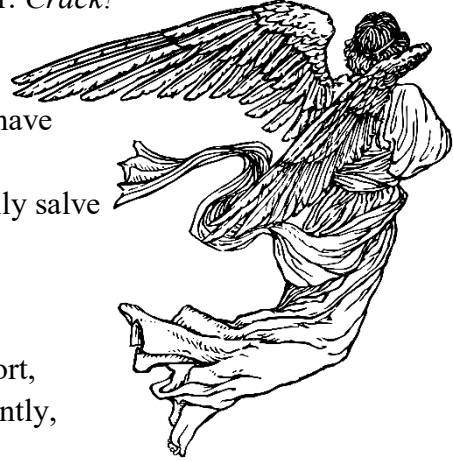
by Charles Hughes



“Jump back!” she heard, and she jumped back.
 (This happened long ago.)
 A lightning flash, then thunder. *Crack!*
 The tree just missed her toe.

Her father said she shouldn't have
 Gone outside in the storm.
 Her mother rubbed some smelly salve
 On scratches on her arm.

Her brother felt and didn't see
 The hand that stopped him short,
 Feet from a snake coiled patiently,
 Poisonous in the dirt.



“There are,” their grandmother would say,
 “Guardian angels, who
 Try to protect us night and day,
 As yours protected you.”

But people used to be more sure
 Of angels within reach,
 Blessings the children's grandmother
 Took every chance to teach.

Heart Cable Stitch

by Carmen Jackie



About the Artist

Carmen Jackie is a Mexican and Southern Californian writer. She has received a scholarship from the University of California, Riverside MFA program because her writing shows promise. She is currently teaching costume design and has lectured at *NHCC Voces Summer Writing Institute* and helped run a book club for the *Inlandia Institute*. Her favorite pastime is watching Jane Austen inspired movies.

Washed



by **Marcia N. Lynch**



He who gave Saturn rings to wear
Circled a towel around His waist,
Binding Himself to love and serve
This dusty human race.

Loving His own who were in the world,
He loved them to the end.

Washed and dried His betrayer's feet,
Calls me to be His friend.

Butterfly



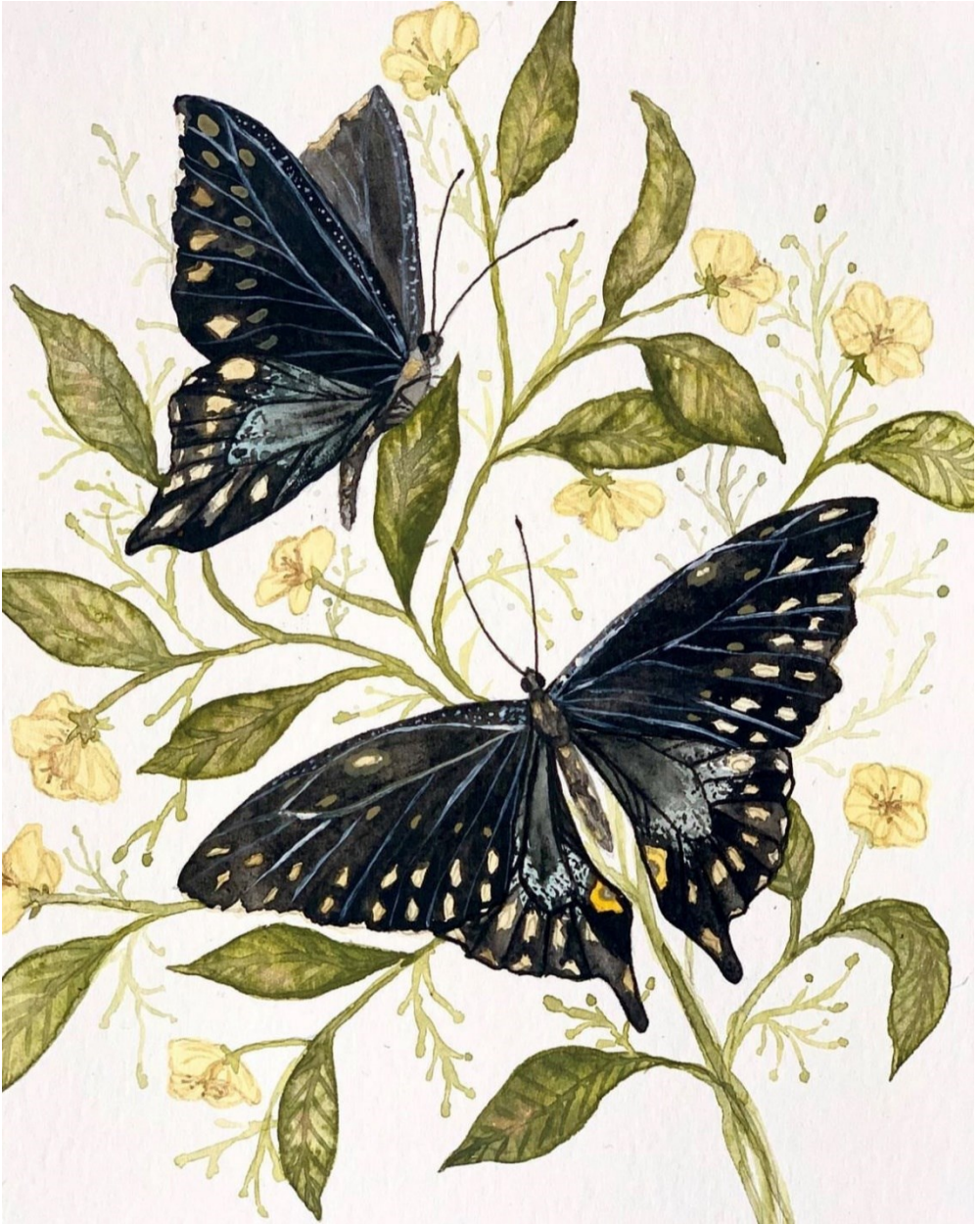
By James Yslas, age 12

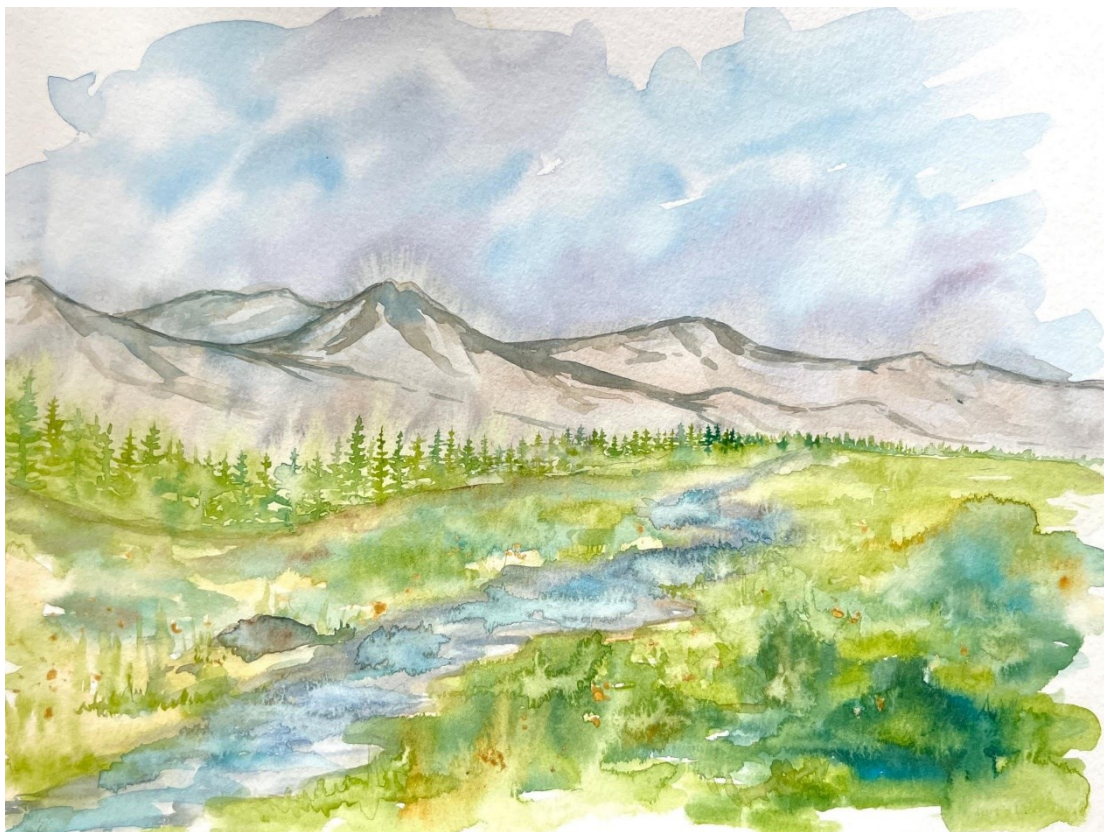
Butterfly, oh butterfly,
with breathtaking beauty that makes me sigh,
gliding gently through the vast blue sky,
soaring, soaring, oh so high,
on wings of orange, oh so bright,
flying gaily past a big beehive,
with a thousand bees buzzing around inside,
on your way up to great heights!
Butterfly, oh butterfly,
oh how majestically you do fly!



Photo taken by James' mom, Stephanie.

Artwork
by **Shayna Miller**





About the Artist

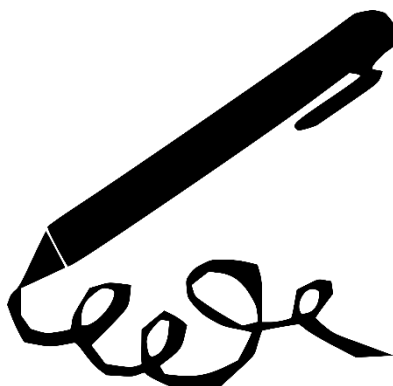
Shayna Miller is a self-taught Christian artist who specializes in watercolor and oil paintings. Most of her work includes vibrant florals, rich landscapes, and detailed nature paintings. She often finds inspiration for her work while spending time in nature, and she enjoys adding the beauty found in everyday life to her paintings.

This Poem Wrote Itself



By Marcia N. Lynch

This poem wrote itself
 With no intended plan
 To show the hidden beauty
 Of a loving hand.
 Guinea hens' dotted feathers
 Are all arranged by chance;
 No Knitter had a pattern,
 It's all just happenstance.
 The twists of DNA
 That cause your eyes to see,
 The sighing of the willow,
 Were not described by me.
 The leaps of joy you feel
 Touching plump and tiny feet
 Are not the touch of One
 Who longs for hearts to meet.
 That melancholic song
 Wasn't sung by me;
 You heard no secret meaning,
 Just a random melody.
 There is no hidden beauty,
 No Love drawing you near.
 This poem wrote itself ...
 And you believe that, dear?

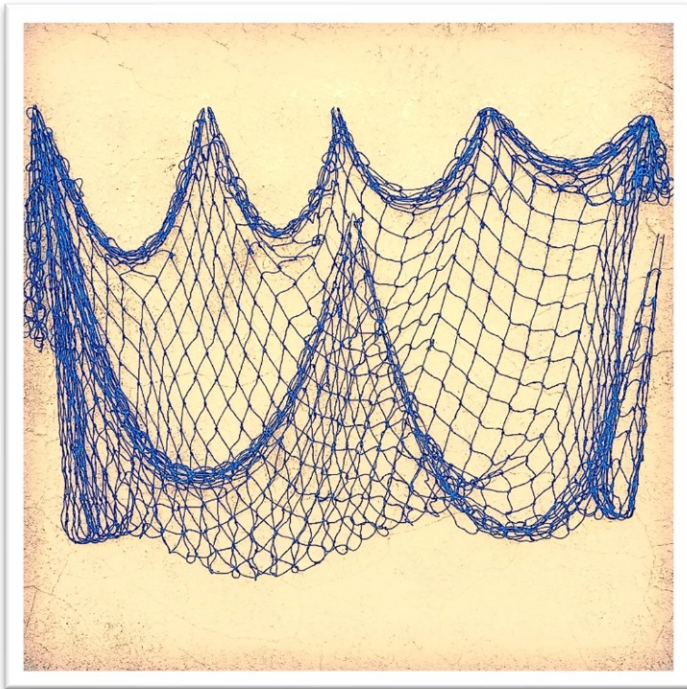


Fishers of Men

By Marcia N. Lynch



Peter cast his shadow
Over the diseased,
Where once he cast a net
Over troubled seas.
Giving sight to the blind,
Scales fall from their eyes,
Restoring healthy minds
To the demonized.
The bait was Holy love
That drew them to repent.
Love sealed up sin's wounds,
Cleaned the fissures of men.

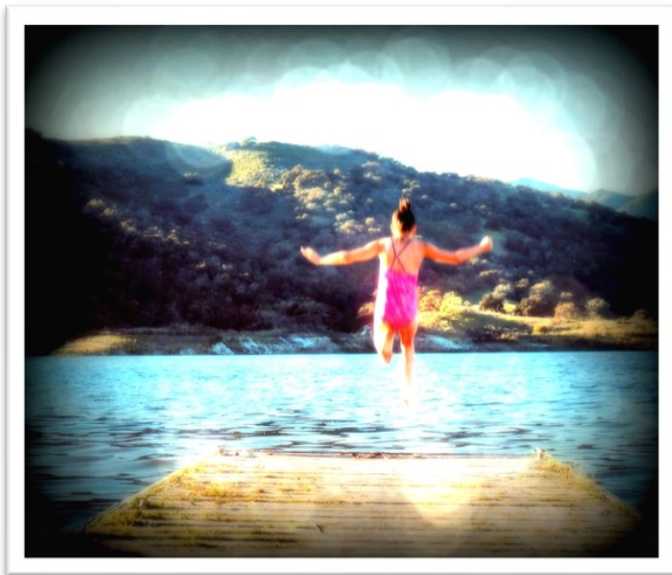


Kid Larkin and the Psalm Formerly Known as Swim



By Laurie Klein

Watch me turn into a knife
the second my toes leave the pier
No baby oil greases *my* dive
Hear my running start
on slaprattle boards
loud as a drum roll
Today I'm a warrior niece
squinching one eye
as I double-dog-dare my shivery self
to slice through the surface
Humbubbles rise like helium
They soothe a tongue that gets snippy
and hurts Mom's feelings
God must have thought of this
First the plunge then silvery ripples
smoothing and smoothing over the cut



About the Poet

Laurie Klein is the author of *Where the Sky Opens* and *Bodies of Water, Bodies of Flesh*. A Pushcart nominee and winner of the Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred, she lives in the Pacific Northwest and blogs, monthly, at <https://lauriekleinscribe.com/>. Kid Larkin has a starring role in Klein's forthcoming collection, *House of 49 Doors: entries in a life* (Poema/Cascade 2024).

Looking Out Towards Simpson Springs

By Michael Shoemaker



Barnacles by the Beach

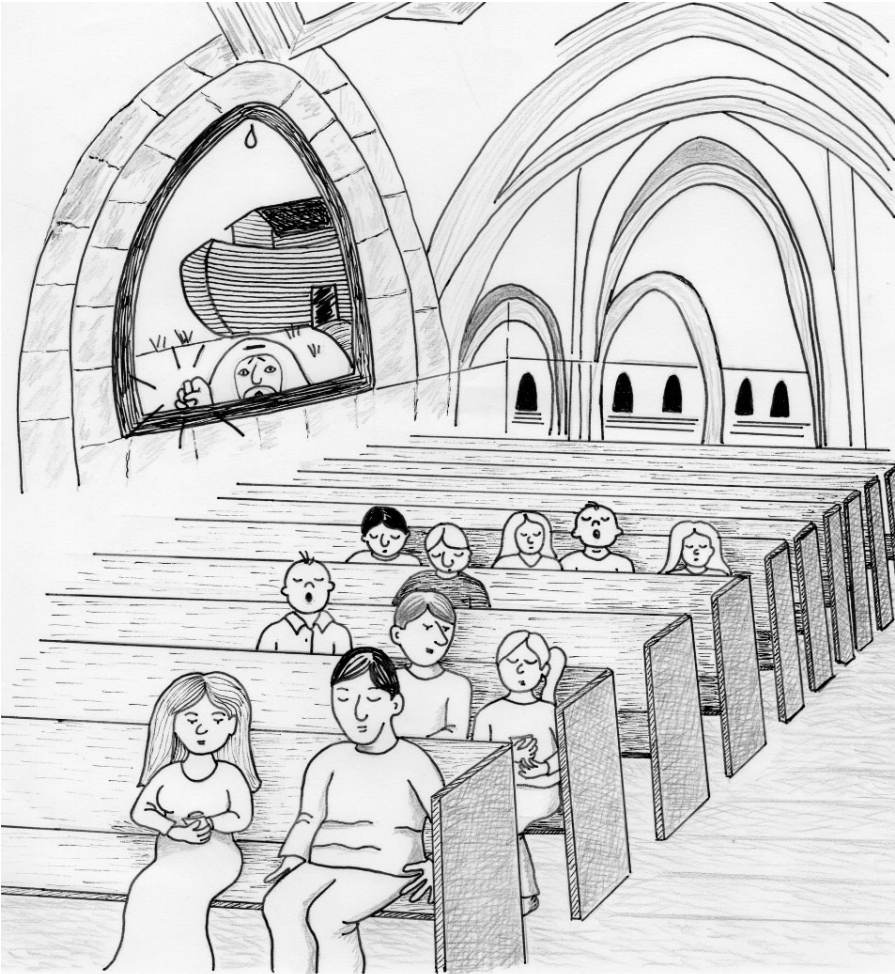
By Michael Shoemaker



About the Photographer

Michael Shoemaker is a poet, writer, and photographer. His photography has appeared in *Front Porch Review*, *Writers on the Range*, *L'Esprit Literary Review*, *Littoral Magazine*, *Yahoo.com*, and elsewhere. He lives in Magna, Utah. Michael's new book of photography and Christian poetry, *Rocky Mountain Reflections*, can be purchased at <https://poetschoice.in/beta/product/rocky-mountain-reflections/>.

Comic
by Pat Anderson



Joke

by **Fernando Guerrero, age 12**

- 1: The person telling the joke
- 2: The person hearing the joke

1: Why did Jesus and his disciples get a table for 26 even though there were only 13 of them?

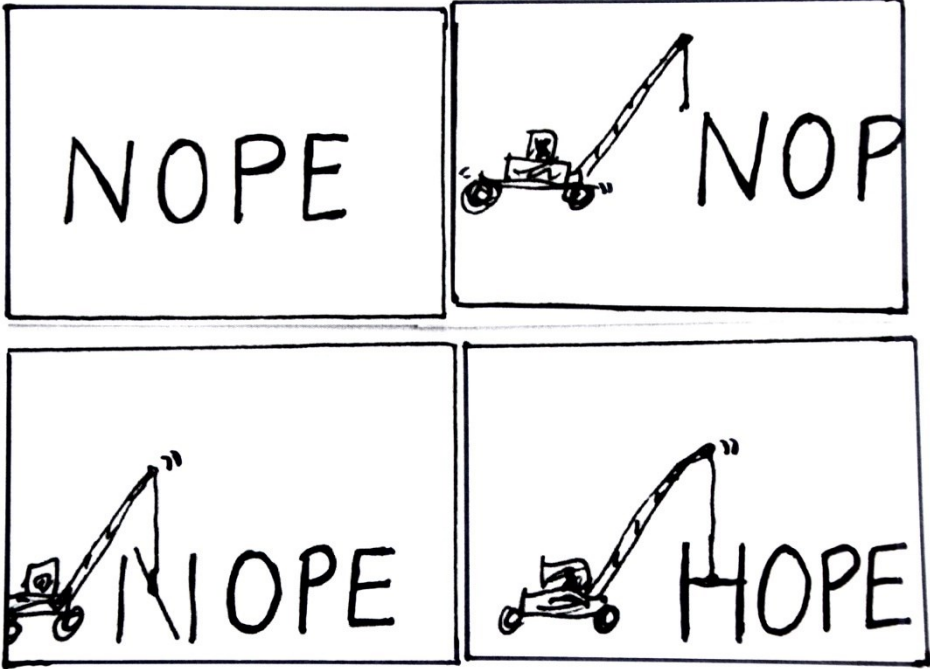
2: I don't know, why?

1: Because they were all going to sit on the same side!



Comic

By Marcia N. Lynch



God Became Man



by Pat Anderson



Once upon a time, God became man. Yep, God told His son, Jesus (who was also God) to go live on Earth for a while to show the people what He's like. Now even though Jesus was also God, He was the son, and sons do what their fathers tell them. So ... Jesus put on His superpower cape and flew down to Earth No, it didn't happen like that.

God had special parents chosen for His son. He told Jesus something like this, "I'm going to grow you from the beginning like a regular human and place you as a baby inside a young woman's tummy. Her name is Mary, and she will be your mom. When the time comes you will be born on Earth." Did Jesus argue and say He didn't want to leave the perfect land of Heaven and go to Earth only to experience skinned knees, tummy aches, and bullies, to name only a few miseries? No. He understood that his trip would be very difficult, the most difficult thing He or anyone would ever do. But He didn't complain. Why? Because of His great love for the people on Earth who were living and behaving as if they didn't know God loved them. He must try to save them.

Finally, one day—the day we now call Christmas—Mary gave birth. Not in a clean hospital, not even in a hotel room, but in a dusty stable surrounded by donkeys and cows. God wanted the people of Earth to know that Jesus wasn't the kind of prince the people couldn't speak to if they were poor. Jesus came to be everyone's prince, the Prince of Peace. If we have *shalom* (the Hebrew word for peace) we have a relationship with God and are no longer poor or hopeless. We are loved. Peacefully loved.

God and Jesus could have just loved us from up in Heaven, but then we wouldn't have seen in person how much we are loved. You must know that Heaven is a perfect land where there is no sickness, pain, hurt feelings, or crying. No one treats anyone badly in Heaven. No one ever goes hungry. Every animal is friendly. And it's truly beautiful! There aren't any fires or hurricanes, or even litter by the side of the roads. Imagine what a huge sacrifice Jesus made to leave that place and come live here for 33 years! 33 years of colds, fevers, hurt feelings, maybe even lice! He experienced these things so He would be able to sympathize with us when we go through them. He certainly had the power to heal himself. He healed many others.

Later, when it was time for His *really* big sacrifice, He allowed mean people to hit Him, spit on Him, tear His clothes, and nail Him to a cross. He hung upright on a wooden cross with big stakes nailed through His hands and feet to hold Him there. His whipped, bloody back scraped up and down on the splintery wood as He struggled to breathe. He could've said, "Enough, Father! This is too hard, too painful. I quit." He could've taken Himself down from that cross. But He stayed. Why? Because of His powerful love for you and me, and for everyone who's ever lived and will live in the future. He understood that His father's plan would reconcile us to Him, giving us *shalom*. God wanted our broken relationship with Him to be mended.

Because of Adam's choice, sin had entered the world, so Jesus needed to come into our world to defeat sin. At the time it didn't look like Jesus was defeating anything. It looked like He had lost. But three days later, Jesus defeated *death*, the worst thing a sinful world has to offer! By defeating death, Jesus beat

Satan—Satan was the one who tempted Adam to sin, losing eternal life for all of us in the perfect Garden of Eden. Jesus bought back the eternal life Adam lost.

Jesus got up from the slab in His tomb, folded His grave cloth, walked through a multi-ton rock door, and began reuniting with His friends. He ate with them. He let any doubters feel the healed scars on His hands. His friends were finally beginning to understand.

Soon afterwards, some of His friends went with Him to the top of a mountain, where He explained why He must go back to Heaven. If He went back, He could send the Holy Spirit to everyone who believes. That way He could be with millions of people at once rather than just a few. He told them He would come again one day to take His friends to live forever with Him in Heaven. His friends were sad to see Him go, but they understood. They understood that they needed to tell everyone about what they now knew about Jesus. Then more and more people could be saved from themselves, from sin, and have *shalom*. So that's just what they did. And that's just what we should do.

Are you Jesus' friend? Then go, use your superpower, the Holy Spirit Jesus has given you, and tell everyone you know about the love of Jesus.

1. What does it mean to be a friend?
2. Are you a friend to someone if you only talk to them when you need something?
3. What are some ways you can tell your friends about the love of Jesus?

About the Writer

Pat Anderson is a music teacher/tennis enthusiast living in sunny Southern California. She has published four children's picture books, writes piano music, and has contributed to *Pure in Heart Stories* issue 5. Her website is patandersonbooks4kids.com.

The Stone Pillow



by Marcia N. Lynch



Genesis 28

I was just lying on the ground like I do all day, every day.

The sun was beginning to set over the dusty ground when a man walked slowly towards me. I could tell he had been traveling, for although he was a young man, his movements were slow and he dragged his feet in the dust. He stopped by me to set up camp for the night, and I heard him and his companions talking about their journey. This man was going to Haran to find a wife! Oh, so this was a romantic journey! I listened carefully for any details, and I heard something about his mother and father wanting him to marry from his mother's family.

“What a good son,” I thought. “Obeying the wishes of his mother and father.” I strained to hear more, but the next thing I knew this man had picked me up, and put me down again, and turned me around a bit. Then he stretched out by the fire, and

put his head on top of me! This bachelor had chosen me for a pillow! Well, I must admit, I don't make a very good pillow, but I tried to think soft thoughts and stay still so he could have a good night's sleep after a long trip. It must have worked because he went right to sleep.

Then his head moved, and he twitched. I could tell he was dreaming. But not just any dream. This was a dream from God. In his dream, he saw a stairway, kind of like a ladder, resting right behind me on the earth. And this ladder stretched all the way into the heavens. It made me dizzy!

Now, let me tell you something. Stones don't look up very often. We are very attached to the earth, and we can't move by ourselves. Our meteorite brothers see the heavens, but I am a desert stone, and I have never seen anything like what I saw that night. There, with this man's head resting on me, I saw the heavens spilling out angels who went effortlessly up and down this endless stairway! What a glorious sight! These beautiful, celestial beings from my Creator's throne in the heavenlies!

Then, HE spoke—the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac! He showered my human bedmate with wonderful promises. I'll tell you what he said, but I am a mere stone, and I cannot describe His loving and majestic voice, but here are the words He spoke:

“I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. (*Hear that! He means right here by me, little pillow-stone me!*) Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. (*I know that's true; he has always watched over me!*) And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

I lay there, glowing warm all over even though the fire had gone out hours ago. My God had spoken to this man and told him the Great Promise to His people. What a dream! What a night!

Then the man woke up. He was clearly shaken and frightened, and said out loud, “Surely the LORD was in this place and I was not aware of it. This place is awesome! This is the house of God! This is the gate of Heaven!”

I was so excited for the man that I could have done a little rock and roll right there in the desert! God told him in the Promise Dream that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth (I live in the dust every day. I like that thought). That meant his journey to Haran would be successful! He would find a wife and have a family. I was so happy for him, I wanted to tag along and see his bride and watch his children grow up. But before I knew it, the man—named Jacob—picked me up again. He looked right at me. He probably just saw a plain stone, but I was looking at a man with a bright new future. He then set me on top of a pile of stones, and I felt this cool, slippery oil poured all over me. That felt good! He then gave me a name! He called me “Beth-el” which means “House of God.” I felt humble and proud, all at the same time.

Jacob and his companions went on their way to meet his bride. But I stayed behind. My place was here. With my glistening face shining in the morning sun, I was a stone with a name! “House of God.”

Jacob will come back here. I know it because it was in God’s Promise Dream. I will stay and mark this spot forever, and at night I will dream of the soft rustle of angels brushing past me to touch the earth.

Salt & Light

by **Jeff Johnson**



Description of *Salt & Light* by the Artist:

This painting explores the wonder and awe of a child exploring the world, held in safety by a loving father but encouraged to reach out and explore. To me, being salt and light and participating in the healing of our world is done only from a place of belonging—in the arms of God.

About the Artist

Jeff Johnson paints out of his sense of wonder for the world around him. His paintings are known for being shot through with coursing light and drizzled with vivid color. Jeff's work does not brush over the difficulties and pain of life with a sappy representation of perfection. Instead, he expresses his sense of wonder through a lens of hope and redemption for the world.

Andrew and the Evil Spirit

by Bec Nanayakkara



Based on the story of the demon-possessed boy in Matthew 17:14-23, Mark 9:14-29, and Luke 9:40-44.

When Jesus gave his disciples the power to cast out demons and heal the sick, Andrew looked at his hands—they were the rough hands of a simple fisherman. Could hands like these really perform mighty miracles? It did not seem possible...

But it was! And the next day, when Andrew went out with the others, he made a blind girl see. Andrew looked at his rough fisherman hands—he could hardly believe it.

In the weeks that followed, Andrew healed many more people. He made the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute speak, and the lame walk. What a gift it was to do God's good work!

But when Andrew looked again at his rough fisherman hands, his stomach tightened. This power and authority, these miracles—it all seemed too good to be true.

Suddenly, there was a cry from the crowd.

“Please,” said a man. “Please heal my son! He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk.”

In an instant the sky became dark. A voice in Andrew’s head whispered, “You’re not worthy to do God’s work.” Andrew pushed the voice away. He ignored the dark clouds, and he prayed over the boy ...

But nothing happened. Andrew felt his heart sink, like a net cast out to sea.

The man begged Andrew and the others to try again. But the crowd began to murmur, “They can’t do it. Their power is not enough.”

A strong wind began to blow. The disciples whispered amongst each other, “What’s going on? Why can’t we heal this boy?”

Andrew looked at his rough fisherman hands. “It’s your fault,” said the voice in his head. “You’re not good enough to do God’s work.”

Thunder grumbled, lightning flashed, the crowd murmured, the man begged, the disciples panicked, and then ...

“What is all this arguing about?” It was Jesus!

The crowd fell silent. Andrew felt his cheeks burn.

“Teacher,” said the man, “I asked your disciples to heal my son, but they couldn’t do it. Have mercy on us and help us if you can!”

The wind came to a stop. Andrew held his breath.

“What do you mean, ‘If I can?’” said Jesus. “Anything is possible if a person believes.”

“I do believe!” said the man. “But help me overcome my unbelief!”

Suddenly, Andrew understood. It didn’t matter that he was a simple fisherman. It didn’t matter that his hands were rough. What mattered, more than anything, was that he believed in God’s mighty power.

Andrew watched as Jesus cast out the evil spirit. At last, the boy was free. And as the boy spoke, and sang, and laughed out loud, at last, Andrew believed ...

He believed that God can do anything—even when He works through the rough hands of a simple fisherman.

About the Writer

Bec Nanayakkara is a Christian, homeschooling mum-of-five living in rural NSW, Australia. She is also a children’s author and her first two picture books will be out next year. Bec’s background is in Education and Wellbeing and she writes stories to encourage, uplift and inspire. For those interested, Bec regularly shares fun facts about her writing journey on Instagram [@becnanayakkara](https://www.instagram.com/becnanayakkara).

The Janitor's Closet

by Mia McDonald, age 11



The alarm went off, apparently for the second time that morning. I woke up realizing that I was so late! I'd be tardy for my first day of school. Grabbing my bag with one hand, my books in the other, and a waffle in my mouth, I ran out the door. There is some weird magic about the first day of school. It's like the whole world is trying to play their part in making you late. When I arrived, the teacher was going over class rules like "be kind," "don't touch other peoples' things," and stuff like that. "Oh, and one more housekeeping policy," she said. "The janitor's closet down the hall to the left is strictly forbidden."

"Why?" was the first question my friend Alissa asked our teacher. Usually "why" was the first question Alissa asked everyone. "Because" was the answer she was given. Alissa was not pleased with this answer, I could tell, but didn't speak again until after class.

“Come on, Grace!” Alissa told me. “Please, let’s go!” Alissa already wanted to go into the janitor’s closet.

“Are you kidding?”

“Nope,” said Alissa. “Not even a little bit.”

“Well ... I guess a small peek wouldn’t be so bad, as long as we don’t get caught.” And that is exactly where we went. Down the hall to the left, we saw a small closet that looked like it hadn’t been opened since the year the school was built. Its handle was rusted, and I thought it might not even open. But still, there is something very magical about an abandoned closet that is not to be opened.

Finally, I turned the handle. Believe it or not, it opened. As I slowly walked in trying to be aware of my surroundings, Alissa slowly came in behind me, and ... *BAM!* Everything went dark. Alissa had pushed me all the way in and slammed the door shut. I couldn’t see anything.

I tried to call out to her, but I couldn’t see anything and I didn’t want the teachers to hear. I didn’t have the slightest clue on how to get out.

Then I heard something sliding off a shelf, and that was when I had the sudden feeling like I was falling, falling into somewhere different.

When I came to my senses, I realized I couldn’t possibly still be in California. I looked around and saw miles and miles of sand as far as the eye could see. But there also was a great palace, and in the distance, I saw many pyramids. I paced in the sand wondering what to do. If I stayed put, there didn’t seem that good of a chance of anyone finding me. So, I decided to head to the palace.

It seemed a lot closer than it really was. I walked maybe five miles, which is a lot for an eleven-year-old. After that, just when I didn’t know if I could go on anymore, a man in a chariot came

towards me. Then I knew this wasn't California. Who used chariots anymore?!

As the man on the chariot approached, I started to wonder, why was he coming towards me? He got closer and closer, and soon there could be no mistake that the man was headed straight for me. Then he said something in a different language and beckoned me to ride with him.

He took me right to the palace, which if he hadn't it probably would have taken me a week to get there. Once I was inside, he said one more thing and put his hand up as a halt. So, there I waited until he came back and beckoned me again. This time he took me before who I guess was their king. When I saw him it all made sense. I wasn't in California; I was in old Egypt! And that was their Pharaoh! We had studied Egypt last year, and it all made sense.

Now that I knew they were Egyptians, it made sense I didn't understand their language. But I didn't know any Egyptian customs or religions. And I still didn't know what they were saying ... to me and to each other. I'd never been out of the country and didn't plan on doing it the first day of school. School! I'd completely forgotten about school! Now I really needed to get home. As soon as I had thought about these things the chariot man and the Pharaoh had finished talking. Then they turned to me. The man from the chariot escorted me to a large room with beautiful art on the walls and gold decorations everywhere. It took me a while to notice the beautiful figure that was sitting in a chair. I determined that it must be the princess, compared to the Pharaoh she was very young.

I didn't know what they expected me to do in that room, so I stared at the magnificent walls when the beautiful lady addressed me. At least, I think she addressed me. I don't really know what she said.

Just then, something small came down the river from outside the open window. It was a small basket. The princess saw this and called for one of her maids to get it. Inside was a baby. I didn't

know what to think about this a baby in a basket in a river, and I think her maid felt the same. But she just looked at him adoringly. Suddenly, a little girl not much older than me came and spoke to the princess. The princess responded and the girl left immediately.

Sometime later, the girl returned with a tired woman. She was not old, but she looked with tired eyes and worn hands. The princess handed the baby to the woman and gave her two silver coins and left. I didn't quite understand this exchange but then again, it was ancient Egypt.

The woman came back a little bit later. She handed the baby back to the princess and left. It was nearly dark, and one of the servants showed me where I could sleep.

The next morning, I woke up early. I really missed my own mattress; straw really wasn't the most comfortable. I got up and went to explore a little more. It's not every day you get to walk around in ancient Egypt.

But I really needed to start thinking about how to get home and how long I had been gone. If I did get home, I didn't know what to do with Alissa. After all, she was the reason I was stuck there in the first place. But I'd determine that later. I needed to get home first.

Just then, I heard a crash similar to when I entered the closet. The world went dark, and I fell again.

Then I heard the familiar voice of Alissa. "Grace, wake up, wake up."

I was so happy to see her I forgot all about how I was mad at her. "What happened?" I asked her.

"We went in the closet, and this fell on your head." She held up a metal mop bucket. "I'm sorry," she said.

"It's ok, I'm not hurt."

She helped me up. We ran to our third-period class.

“Where were you two?” my teacher asked. Me and Alissa looked at each other.

Lemonade Angel

by K.G. Song



Sitting by the window of her bedroom, Marie watched Mrs. Hong dragging her worn-out shopping cart behind her. Mrs. Hong stopped every ten steps or so and rested. Whenever she stopped for a rest, she touched her chest as if she wanted to make sure her heart was okay.

Marie noticed that the shopping cart contained only a few items as usual. Marie's mother said Mrs. Hong makes a trip to the market almost every day for exercise more than shopping. The round trip would take almost two hours for Mrs. Hong even though the market was only a mile away.

It was barely ten o'clock in the morning, but the blazing summer sun beat down everything with relentless and blinding brightness. Sweat covered Mrs. Hong's face and her thin dress stuck to her body as if she had just come out of a swimming pool.

Marie ran down to the kitchen. With a glass of cool lemonade, she ran outside and offered it to Mrs. Hong. Mrs. Hong smiled at Marie and accepted the lemonade with a bow. She drank it with delight and handed the empty glass back to Marie with a

bow. Mrs. Hong did not speak English well, but her gentle smile and humble bows won over many people in the neighborhood.

Mrs. Hong came from a faraway country when the country was torn apart by a war. She and her son walked many miles to escape from the country when her village was bombed, and her home destroyed.

Marie's church sponsored to bring Mrs. Hong and her son to the United States. For several years, they lived in a cottage at the church. Her son grew up and lived in the city, working at a university hospital as a doctor, but Mrs. Hong refused to move from her new hometown.

"Why do you touch your chest once in a while?" Marie couldn't stop herself from asking when Mrs. Hong touched the chest one more time before she got ready for the next ten steps.

Mrs. Hong pulled the chain around her neck and pulled out a simple wooden cross. "I ask ... God for help."

"Oh, does God help you?"

"Yes, all the time. God just sent an angel. You." Mrs. Hong pointed at Marie with a big smile and made a deep bow.

About the Writer

K.G. Song lives in Los Angeles in Southern California with his wife and a parrot. After rediscovering the joy of creative writing during the pandemic lockdown, he continues to craft flash fictions, short stories, and poems each day as he learns the art of writing as well as how to retire properly after many splendid adventures in life in Christ.

Beatrix



By Holly Braendlein, age 15



What am I going to do? Beatrix thought to herself. She was stranded on a tiny, deserted island. She had a splitting headache, and she was devoid of courage. She had not been able to defeat the enemy and save the people. She still had a chance, but things didn't look too good for her. She thought back to when she woke up to the sound of her Enemy Finder

Beatrix opened her eyes wearily as her Enemy Finder resounded like a gong in her head. She sat up and groaned as she reached for her computer. 6:00 in the morning. She got out of bed and dressed in her suit. Her superhero suit was bluebird blue and flexible for moving on snow and ice swiftly. Likewise, her boots were specially made to turn into ice skates or grippers for whatever occasion. She slipped on her boots and then grabbed for her special watch. She set it to take her to the scene of the crime. Within seconds, she disappeared.

Beatrix reappeared on a dock by the ocean. The waves crashed against the rocks as she peered ahead of her toward the horizon. She saw a gray figure coming slowly towards her. Beatrix recognized him as Luftus, who had power over the wind.

Beatrix ran and landed on the water, and as her foot touched it, the water froze solid allowing her to run on it. She ran toward Luftus and eventually caught up with him.

Luftus was standing comfortably on a small gray cloud, the same color as his suit, hovering over the water. As she neared, she directed her palms toward him and issued forth an icy blast to throw him off guard. He acted quickly by redirecting the ice back at her with his wind. Beatrix dodged as it hurtled past her.

Luftus smiled fiendishly at her. “Vut a cold greeting you gave me. Vut is da trouble?”

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out,” Beatrix replied. “What are you doing here? Whatever it is can’t be good.”

Luftus feigned being offended. “Vut is this you speak? I have da feeling you don’t tink too well of me. Be assured, I am on your side now.”

“What do you mean? That can’t be.” Beatrix answered.

“Oh, but it is true! You see, I was called by your God to execute his wrath upon dis people. You said yourself that everybody is sinful. God wants to put things right, and so he chose me. I am very honored.” Luftus said, tossing his head. “Now if you vill excuse me, I have some very important tings to do.” And with that, he ventured on toward land.

He paused for a second. He waved his hands in the air, closed his eyes, and whispered to himself what sounded like incantations. Slowly, black clouds came and swarmed about in a circle, before finally growing and turning into a huge tornado. It was extremely loud. The wind blew through Beatrix’s long, red hair.

Thinking fast, Beatrix jumped into the air, and before landing on a little patch of ice she had made, her boots transformed into ice skates. She skated swiftly toward Luftus. As she neared him, she shot an icy blow to his cheek and said, “I don’t believe you were sent by God to destroy human life.”

Luftus was furious because he now had to make another tornado. He pushed her aside. “Oh, yah? You just vatch!” He

made another tornado, and sped toward the shore, cackling to himself.

Beatrix raced him to the shore, but she could see she was losing. She wouldn't reach it in time. Everybody would be swept out of their houses by Luftus' tornado, and very likely dropped into the ocean, or something worse, like a volcano.

Knowing that frost protects a plant from freezing to death, Beatrix thought frost might provide an answer to her dilemma. Beatrix summed up all her strength and shot ice over everything in town.

Luftus screamed in rage! He turned to Beatrix and tried to sweep her off her feet with the tornado. Beatrix froze it and skated away from the bank. Luftus wasn't about to fall for her tricks. He summoned another tornado and stood his ground.

Before she knew it, Beatrix felt herself being pulled backward by some strong force. She realized she was being sucked up by Luftus' tornado! She struggled to gain her ground, even switching her boots for grip-control boots, but it was too late. She let go of the ground and found herself twirling inside the tornado.

She was so dizzy, so nauseous! Her body was banged here and there from the intense force of the wind. Suddenly, she heard Luftus cackle wildly.

"Now," He said, "I will banish you to a faraway island where you can't disturb me, and don't even think about calling on God! He's on my side!"

And with that, he swung the tornado in circles, and then let go, sending Beatrix flying away.

Beatrix sighed. She knew she wasn't enough for this task. Her frost wouldn't last long. She had about thirty minutes to find a solution before the frost melted.

She started to have nagging doubts. What if what he said about God destroying civilization was true? What if she had failed because God was stopping her?

But then she remembered the record in Genesis 8 when God relented after forty days of flooding the earth. He had put a rainbow in the sky, as an everlasting covenant between God and mankind, that He wouldn't flood the earth and destroy mankind again. She also thought back through all the stories of mankind's screw-ups and of God's merciful kindness in not destroying us, even though we deserved it sevenfold. He forgave David for the murder of Bathsheba's husband. He forgave Paul for executing His saints. He never destroyed mankind, so can't she trust Him to carry on that loving-kindness?

But she was still in a pickle. *How in the world am I going to get off this island?*

Suddenly, something dropped on the sand behind her. It was a palm leaf from the tree behind her She thought hard. *I could take the palm branches, freeze them, and craft them into the shape of a small boat.* Before getting to work, she thanked God for giving her a solution.

Before long, she had fashioned a boat with the branches. She had only ten minutes to save the townspeople. She pushed the boat into the water, got into it, and turned around so she could propel it with ice. She had to hurry!

Five minutes remained.

Luftus was just visible ahead of her, playing around, waiting until the frost melted.

Four minutes.

Luftus prepared his tornado for action.

Three minutes remaining.

Beatrix was close enough now to make her attack. She jumped out of her boat and shot ice at Luftus in midair.

Luftus, regaining his balance, screamed in outrage at her arrival. “*VUT!!!* I thought I had gotten vid of you! Apparently, I didn’t do a good enough job!” He turned his tornado at Beatrix and sucked her into it.

Beatrix twirled around helplessly. This is exactly what had gotten her in trouble last time she got sucked up.

Two minutes remaining.

Suddenly, she realized that maybe she was shooting at the wrong object. She had thus far been aiming at Luftus because he kept getting disoriented when he was shot. What would happen if she froze his tornado? She had no time to wonder. She now had ten seconds remaining. She prayed and then cut to the chase.

She summoned up all of her strength and iced the walls of wind around her.

10 ...

Luftus caught on quickly, making it even stronger. The walls started beating down on her. But Beatrix only shot harder.

9 ...

“*YOU VILL NEVAH VIN!*”

8 ...

Beatrix was getting tired, but she had to hang on.

7 ... 6 ... 5 ...

Luftus started to panic. “Stop! Stop! STOP!!!”

Beatrix blocked him out and pushed harder.

4 ... 3 ... 2 ...

She summoned her last bit of energy and pushed the wind away.

1 ...

There was a huge crack in the atmosphere, and everything went dark.

When Beatrix woke up, she found herself on the beach. She remembered what had been going on, and looked around. She saw the townspeople coming out of their houses, scratching their heads. She sighed in relief. Then she searched for Luftus. He was nowhere to be found. Beatrix got up and brushed herself off.

She pulled out her special watch, set the time for home, and disappeared. She had to rest up before her next assignment.

About the Writer

Holly Braendlein is a young girl who wants to use her writing for God’s glory. She is 15 and lives in Kent, WA.

Time and Temperature Girl



By M. Paul Rains



The little girl picked up the phone to call time and temperature. She dialed the number and it rang, and after a few seconds, a voice was heard.

“This is Larry.”

The little girl hesitated. Maybe she had dialed the wrong number. On the other hand, maybe they had just changed the person.

“Hello?” the voice said again.

“Uh, could you give me the time and temperature?” the girl asked.

Silence for a moment.

“Why not. It’s 6:45 and, uh, 64 degrees.”

The girl waited.

“Is that all?” said the man.

“What’s the high?” the girl asked.

“Okay ... yeah. Well, it looks like 76 degrees,” the man said.

“Is it gonna rain?”

“Is it gonna rain,” the voice repeated flatly.

“Yeah. Mommy told me I had to wear my g’loshes. I don’t wanna.”

“Look, kid ...”

Another pause. A rather lengthy pause. The girl waited patiently. A quirk of the new system, she figured.

When the man spoke again, his voice was different. “Little girl, you go tell your mama it’s probably not gonna rain. It’s going to be a good day.”

“Ok. Bye.”

“Goodbye.”

The next morning, the little girl pressed “redial” on the receiver and again the Larry man answered. This time he gave all the looked-for information in one seamless articulation, and again concluded with “It’s going to be a good day.” She called the next day, with the same result. Each morning for the first few weeks, it was the same: time, temperature, forecast, and “It’s going to be a good day.” After a few weeks, Larry began to throw in scraps of advice, such as “Better bring your raincoat” or “Bundle up.” Then one day it occurred to the girl to ask Larry about her broken doll. His repair advice to that query proving effectual, she went on to occasionally ask him about other things, such as how to make a sunny-side egg, how to cut your own hair, and whether dragons were real. This being an intelligent and thoughtful little girl, her questions became increasingly sophisticated. Among her later questions were why people die, whether her hamster would go to Heaven, and how to make someone happy. (This last query was a result of her mother seeming especially sad of late.) But whatever the topic

of conversation, for the eight consecutive weeks the girl redialed his number, Larry always ended the call by promising “It’s going to be a good day.” And for the girl, indeed, those eight weeks were a solid run of more or less good days.

Unfortunately, the last morning Larry gave the time and temperature turned out to be the first day he was wrong. The girl’s best friend told her she wouldn’t play with her anymore because she was poor and dressed weird. She went home crying. It was a bad day, unequivocally. She couldn’t wait to take this up with Larry, to tell him how wrong he’d been.

But when the girl pressed “redial” the next morning, her grandmother answered. This sometimes happened when the girl’s mother used this particular phone, which was rare. The phone was only able to redial the last number called. The girl proceeded to dial the time and temperature number from memory, but instead of Larry, the original automated time and temperature voice answered. Only then did she realize that she had had the wrong number on redial for the last two months. She attempted multiple slight deviations from the listed time and temperature number, but all attempts failed to connect her back to Larry. She finally had to leave for school, and the day was a morose muddle.

That night and the next morning, she tried again to accidentally hit upon the right wrong number, to no avail. She would continue to do this from time to time for the next two years, but she was never able to find Larry. She finally gave up calling real time and temperature. It just wasn’t the same.

Years went by and the girl grew into a woman. She moved out of town for college, eventually coming back home for her second job. One Saturday morning, she was on her way to the grocery store when an accident prompted her to take an alternate route she had never driven. After several blocks, she noticed a line of cars snaked in front of a building with a sign in front advertising “Larry’s Donuts.” A sudden strong presentiment caused her to pull into the parking lot and walk in.

“Welcome to Larry’s,” said the teenager at the counter.

“Hi,” she said, pretending to look at the menu. “I’ve never been here before.”

“Our Original is very popular.”

Seized all at once by a feeling of the futility of this errand, the woman told the teenager she guessed she didn’t want to order after all, thanked him, and turned to go.

“Well, enjoy the sun ma’am. It’s going to be a good day.”

The woman stopped. She recalled and analyzed the distinctiveness—the strangeness—of the impression that had caused her to visit a random doughnut shop simply because it had the name “Larry” affixed to it. Whatever the impression was, wherever it came from, she decided she couldn’t accept it as just another vagary. Turning around, she walked back to the counter. “Actually ... I don’t know how to say this,” she said, “but I ... when I was a girl, I used to call time and temperature, and for a while, a guy named Larry used to give it to me, but I don’t know who he was. And just now I passed this place and wondered if perhaps this was the same Larry, although really I have no reason to ... that is, I know it’s a long shot. I suppose you wouldn’t know anything about it.”

To his credit, the teenager—who had never heard of such a thing as “calling time and temperature”—took the inquiry seriously.

“I really don’t know ma’am, but lemme go back and ask. If you could wait over there by that table”

The teenager was gone in an instant. After a couple of minutes, she was approached by a young man who appeared to be the owner or manager, and who was holding something in his hands.

“Can I help you?” he said.

She began. “Hi, I’m here because—”

“Wait,” he interrupted. “I’m happy to help you, but first I need to tell you that it’s a quarter to nine and currently 66 degrees. Today will be sunny, with a high of 78.”

The woman stared at him.

“And perhaps you’ll also want to know,” he continued, “that there is zero chance of rain today.”

The woman still looked fixedly at him. “You’re not Larry,” she said.

“No, I’m not Larry,” he said. “But I know about you. My dad told me how you called him out of nowhere one day asking about the time and temperature and rain and then called almost every day for weeks before you abruptly left off. Of course, Caller ID hadn’t made it to town yet, so he was at a loss. Right before he passed away—”

“Oh, I’m ...” She faltered, earnestly dismayed. “I am sorry.”

The man nodded slightly. “Right before that,” he continued, looking down at the small plastic box in his hands, “he gave me some index cards with various instructions and advice. One of the cards in there is labeled, ‘Time and Temperature Girl.’ It says if ever by chance I found you, I was to give you the time, temperature, and forecast before I did anything else. I frankly dismissed such a chance as nearly nonexistent ...” He looked up at her and smiled. “But here you are.”

She continued to stare at him. “Yes,” was all she found to say.

“Also, he wanted me to tell you—and he underlined this—that it’s going to be a really good day.”

The woman became all at once bright and fluent. “It’s funny, when I was little I had a bone to pick with Larry about that. The last day I talked to him he told me it was going to be a good day and ... well, it was kind of a bad day. Then I lost his number and wasn’t able to take it up with him. And, um ... well, I’ve had

some more bad days since then, and I guess ...” Her beam faded. “I guess I would have liked to tell him about those too.”

“I know what you mean,” the man said. “Maybe he thought you’d say something like that. Near the bottom of this card, he says to tell you that the reason he knows it’s going to be a good day is because *you* are in it.”

A small tear traced its way down the woman’s cheek.

“Anything else on that card?” she said after at least a minute and a half.

“Do you like coffee and doughnuts?” the man asked, grinning a bit awkwardly.

“He wanted to know if I like coffee and doughnuts?” she asked, smiling again.

“No ... I mean, I’m asking: would you like some doughnuts? On the house. I’ll join you. I haven’t eaten yet. How ’bout an Original?”

Thankfully, for the woman’s sake, she accepted the invitation, because a day that had begun so well would prove to get even better, and would leave her with a sense that a certain years-long disquietude of soul had been tended to.

And thankfully, for the man’s sake, the woman didn’t refer again to the contents of the “Time and Temperature Girl” index card. For it would be some time before he would be ready to read her the last line written on it: *If you ever find this girl, marry her.*

About the Writer

M. Paul Rains lives with his wife Jessamyn and their children on Walden Ridge, near Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Artwork

By Richard Hanus



About the Artist

Richard Hanus: Had four kids but now just three. Zen and Love.

The Taffy



By Alysia C. Anderson



Red gel rolled down Jimmy's arm as he bit into his strawberry jelly sandwich. He always ate strawberry jelly sandwiches, but sometimes he imagined they were chicken, ham, or beef. Meat, any meat, would be a treat, but for now, he would settle with what he was blessed. As he licked the red jelly off his arm, he felt someone's eyes on him.

Jimmy lifted his head, seeing Sunée prancing around in her dress. Sunée loved that dress and never seemed to take it off. Every time he saw her, she was in that dress, talking over and over about her sister's wedding. He could not stand that dress, especially the color. Pink reminded him of roses. They look pretty and smell sweet, but they were full of bees ready to sting you. Sunée was like that too.

"Whatcha doing?" Sunée asked, standing in front of him.

Jimmy looked up, squinting his eyes in the bright sun, "Eatin.' What's it look like?"

"Oh," Sunée replied, sitting on his right. She fixed her dress, careful not to flash her undergarments. The pink dress had many white layers underneath that made it fluff out, hitting Jimmy's leg. Once she felt situated, she stared at him with a big grin.

He took a deep breath and tried to ignore her, but the fluffy dress reminded him she was there. He could hear his momma's words echoing in his ear, *Patience is a virtue*. Jimmy was not sure what his momma meant by that, but he had a feeling patience did not exist around Sunée.

“Oh, look. It's a giant bug needin' to be squashed.”

Jimmy looked up; his best friend walked up behind them. He smiled as the red-headed Teat joined his side. Teat never liked Sunée. With any chance he had, he tried his best to run her off. Jimmy counted down until that moment.

“Too bad I ain't got no boots,” Teat said, “Cuz I ain't wantin' your guts on my shoes.”

Jimmy smirked, trying to hold in his laughter as Sunée put her hands on her hips. Teat always knew how to aggravate her, and he enjoyed every second of it.

“Shut up, Teat,” Sunée fussed at him as she stood up. She flared her nostrils and leaned forward. Her dress fluffed up in the back, and she glared at him with her red eyes. Like an angry bee that just got swatted, she buzzed, “Shut up, Teat.”

“What?” Teat replied. “I couldn't understand you with all that buzzing.”

Sunée clenched her fists and punched him in the arm. She was still a tough girl underneath all the fluff.

“Ow,” Teat rubbed his arm and glared. “That hurt.”

“Serves you right,” Sunée answered and turned with her nose in the air as she buzzed off.

Jimmy laughed at Teat's face blending with his hair. “Looks like she stung you,” he said, earning him a punch in the arm from Teat. He grabbed the sore spot and bit his lip, wondering if Sunée punched Teat as hard.

“Good. Now we got peace,” Teat smirked and pulled out a wrapped object out his pocket. As he unwrapped it, a whiff of strawberries filled Jimmy’s nostrils, causing him to focus on the long, slender object Teat held.

“What’s that?” Jimmy asked with his eyes fixed on the object.

“Candy,” Teat answered, tossing the wax wrapper on the ground.

Jimmy tilted his head. He never saw a candy like the one Teat held. “Is it a candy bar?”

“No. Taffy,” Teat replied and bit into it, though he made funny faces as he chewed. “My momma always sends me taffy from New Orleans before she comes home to visit me,” he replied and stuck his finger in his mouth to pry the taffy off the roof of his mouth.

Jimmy looked back at his sandwich, thinking how lucky Teat was to always receive presents from his momma. He took a bite, but it didn’t have the same taste as before.

After school, Jimmy followed Teat to his grandma’s house. Teat and his grandmother lived in the woods at the end of a dirt road. Trees shaded the area, creating a tunnel, and Jimmy couldn’t help but think if this was the reason Teat was pale.

When they arrived at the house, Teat’s grandma, Mary Belle, sat on the porch, rocking anxiously in her chair. She stared and didn’t move until they trudged up the porch steps. Then she stood up, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Good afternoon, Grandma,” Teat smiled as she held a placid face. She never smiled or frowned; she just stood there with her lips in one straight line. “Jimmy’s here to pick up a jar of jelly for his momma.”

Mary Belle nodded and turned to Jimmy, “What kind your momma wants?”

“Strawberry,” Jimmy replied as he stood up straight. Teat’s grandmother always made him nervous. Mrs. Mary Belle wasn’t as old as most of the old ladies in his church, but his momma said her sadness made her age.

Mary Belle nodded and walked into the house without saying another word.

“Come see what my momma sent me,” Teat said as they walked inside the house and to the kitchen counter. He pulled two sticks of taffy out and showed them to Jimmy.

“Are those from the city too?” Jimmy’s eyes widened as he looked at the wrapped piece of taffy. He had never been to a city before, but he imagined every corner was packed with something new and exciting. “They must cost lots of money, like chocolate.”

“Yeah,” Teat replied, nodding his head. “They cost a whole ten cents each, and my momma got me three.”

Jimmy faked a smile. He wished his momma could buy him special treats, but his family didn’t have money. If he was lucky, his momma made strawberry shortcake for his birthday or a sweet potato pie for Thanksgiving.

“Teat, what did I tell you about that candy?” Mary Belle demanded as she tapped her foot.

“I ain’t eating it,” Teat replied. “I was just showing it to Jimmy.”

“I told you not to touch it,” she fussed at him. “Now put it up.”

Teat hung his head and answered, “Yes, ma’am.”

Jimmy watched Mary Belle eye every move Teat made until satisfied. Then, she turned to him. “Here’s the jelly for your momma.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Mary Belle,” Jimmy replied as he took the jar from her. He held it up, studying its red contents.

“You’re welcome,” Mary Belle answered. “Tell your momma I need six eggs.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jimmy nodded, holding onto the jar tight. “I will.”

“Now you boys scat,” Mary Belle ordered them. “I got work to do.”

The next day, Jimmy walked to Teat’s house with his fishing pole in his hand and a small basket of eggs in the other. He planned to catch a big redfish for supper that night. The more he thought about it, the more he could taste it in his mouth.

Instead of Teat, he found Mary Belle on the porch, shaking her head.

“Mrs. Mary Belle, here are the eggs from my momma,” Jimmy said, holding out the basket.

Mary Belle took the basket. “Thank you. Teat’s inside.”

Jimmy stared into the older woman’s eyes. She had been crying. “Is something wrong, Mrs. Mary Belle?”

“Too much for a boy like you.”

Jimmy knew what that meant—stop asking questions and leave. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Jimmy.”

“Ma’am?”

“Thank you for asking. Teat’s got a good friend in you,” Mary Belle said, smiling. “He could use a good friend now.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jimmy said. He smiled back and headed into the house to find Teat sitting on his bed. “You ready to go?”

Teat sat, twirling the taffy around in his fingers.

“Where’s your pole?” Jimmy asked. “Ain’t we goin’ fishing?”

Teat ignored him.

Jimmy wanted to ask Teat what was bothering him, but wasn’t sure what to say. Placing his fishing pole down, he sat down next to his friend and waited.

Teat sighed, looking at a piece of taffy.

“Is that the taffy from the city?” Jimmy asked, remembering the stories Teat told him yesterday.

“Yeah, from New Orleans,” Teat nodded. “She gets it for me. She gets them before she comes home and sends them to me. It’s how she promises.”

“Your momma sounds nice,” Jimmy replied. “You think she’s going to bring you some more when she visits.”

A tear rolled down Teat’s cheek. “She’s not coming.”

Jimmy didn’t know what to say. Yesterday, Teat couldn’t stop talking about his momma coming to visit. Now she wasn’t.

“My momma promised she would come, but she ain’t,” Teat added. “She doesn’t visit me anymore. I don’t think she loves me. Does your momma love you?”

“Yeah,” Jimmy nodded, “but I don’t think my daddy does. He’s always mean to everybody.”

“At least you have a daddy,” Teat replied. “I don’t even know mine. He left just like my momma. They don’t care about me. No one cares about me except my grandma.”

Jimmy thought for a moment. “You can share my momma with me.”

“Really?” Teat sniffled, raising his head up and wiping his nose on his shirt sleeve.

“Yeah,” Jimmy smiled. “My momma likes kids. She’ll like you, too. We can be brothers.”

Teat smiled. He took the piece of taffy and pulled it in half, giving a piece to Jimmy. Together, they ate the last piece in silence.

About the Writer

Alysia C. Anderson is an English instructor at Southeastern Louisiana University, where she teaches freshman composition and American literature. Her short stories have been published in *Tulane Review*, *Louisiana Review*, *Pure in Heart Stories*, and *Country Roads Magazine*. She lives in Folsom, Louisiana, with her husband, son, dog, and farm animals.

Katie's Decision



By Mary Mintz



“Katie-girl, would you join me in here for a moment, please?” asked Thomas Maguire of his only daughter.

“Of course, Father.” Katie set the laundry basket down in the hallway outside his study. “Do you need something?”

“Do you know Jake Braeburn?” He moved to stand behind his desk. “He’s our ranch hand in charge of breaking the mustangs, among other things.”

“Of course, I do,” said Katie, coming to stand in front of him. “Jake has been with us for three or four years, hasn’t he?”

“Well, my dear, a few minutes ago, Jake asked for my permission to, um ...” He gulped and rushed on, “He wants to marry you, Katie. Tomorrow. Has he ever spoken with you about this?”

“Never!”

“Yes, that’s what he said, too. Said he’d never revealed himself, but he told me he fell in love with you the first time he laid eyes on you. He said his admiration for you has grown each and every day since then.”

“Well!” Katie laughed. “That’s completely understandable, isn’t it, Father? I’m sure all the hands are madly in love with me.” She was swaying her long skirts side to side like a ringing bell, in pure amusement. “The others are probably all lined up at the front door as we speak to plead for my hand, seeing as how today is my 18th birthday.” She gave a big, dramatic sigh. “I’ve been expecting this, actually, but I thought they’d do us the courtesy of waiting until after lunchtime.” She shook her head. “Father, if this is you pulling my leg because of the dead snake in your boot, I told you, that was Phillip!”

“You’d better sit down, Katie. This is not a jest. Jake is in the parlor waiting to speak with you after we’re finished here. Things are going to happen very quickly now—like a runaway wagon down a hill. All depending, of course, on your answer. You have a very important decision to make, but time is short.”

She dropped into a straight-backed chair, stunned. “Did you say he wants to marry me tomorrow? Tomorrow.” He nodded once. “But why has he never mentioned any of this to me before?”

“He knew he was just a ranch hand and believed that you deserve so much better.” He sank slowly into his large desk chair. “He has worked himself to exhaustion each day so that he’d be trusted with more and more responsibility, and to save as much money as he could. He said for the last year or so he has been planning to speak with you on this day to see if you would consider courting him.”

“But, why all of a sudden do we have to wed tomorrow!?”

“Because yesterday he received a letter from his sister, Lydia, in Colorado. Their parents both just died of a fever within hours of each other, and he has inherited their ranch. Jake needs to get there as soon as possible, and the next train leaves on Saturday

morning. There's all the legal issues, you see, and all the workings of the ranch to take in hand. He told me he plans to change the ranch from cattle and crops to primarily breeding horses. He will need a wife to oversee the homestead, and he told me you're the only one his heart will let him imagine by his side."

"Father! How can I? I barely know him!"

"Daughter, he's a good man. You must know how I've come to depend on him—he's darn near irreplaceable. Plus, he'll have his own large ranch, so you'll be well provided for." He placed his palms on the desk and leaned forward. "I spoke with your mother right before you came back inside—she's trying to resign herself to the suddenness of it. Believe me, we will both be heartbroken. But we promise to visit you as often as we can. Denver is not even two days away by train."

Katie was looking at her hands clasped tightly in her lap, slowly shaking her head.

"Now, go hear him out, and give him a chance. I know there's not much time to think things through, but he'll try to explain as best he can. I've invited him to have supper with us this evening. Don't keep him waiting any longer, Kathleen Marie. He has a lot to finish up before he takes his leave of the ranch." He came around the desk and hugged her with all the emotion of a tender parent. She then released him, straightened her shoulders, and pivoted for the door.

Katie stepped down the hallway towards the parlor as if in a trance but then turned and ran into the kitchen and into her mother's arms. "Mama, don't let me!"

"Oh, Katie, my dearest. How can I part with you?" Bridget Maguire said as she stroked her daughter's long, chestnut-brown locks. "But I have to trust it's the Lord's will. And going to a new state is not as bad as going to a new country, as I did with your father. Come, pet, dry your eyes. Good," she said with a watery smile. "Here—take this tea tray with you."

Jake stood up as she came into the parlor, one hand down at his side, clutching his hat brim. She felt him watching her as she put the tray down, tea things tinkling, and she tried to breathe deeply to calm her nerves.

“Katie,” he said when she turned to him. His thick brown hair was shiny, and his hands and face were freshly scrubbed—as if it was a Sunday.

“Mr. Braeburn.”

“I don’t know how much your father has told you.”

She stabbed her fists to her waist. “Well, there wasn’t much time for details, was there, with us needing to leave for Colorado in the next five minutes!”

“This isn’t the way I meant for it to happen,” he said softly. “I’m sorry.”

Her hands fell. “No. Forgive me. I’m so sorry about your parents. It’s devastating, to be sure. I know I couldn’t bear it. And it has forced your hand—that I understand.”

“I knew you would. Eventually. But this is just like you—you’re always thinking of others before yourself. That’s one of the things I admire most about you.”

“You’re filling me with shame,” she said. “All I’ve done is think about myself since I walked in the back door with the sheets and pillowcases, totally oblivious to the earth about to fall out from under me.”

Jake led her to the sofa and sat beside her. He spoke to her soothingly and smiled as he recounted particular times over the years when her acts of loving kindness and compassion helped him fall deeply in love with her. It was so very flattering, she admitted to herself. But each time her thoughts veered to getting

on a train and leaving her parents and brother behind, she got a huge lump in her throat and she could hardly breathe.

“You’ll just love my sister Lydia, and I have no doubt she’ll love you, too. Not nearly as much as I do, but—”

“Jake!” she said too loudly. “I don’t know if I can do this.” She looked around the room as if looking for an escape. “Maybe I could visit you in Colorado someday and get to know you better.” She was wringing her hands as she rushed on, “You could show me around your ranch, and we could go on a couple of picnics, and—”

“Katie,” he said gently, his gaze intent. Taking her trembling hands in both of his, he said, “I’ll be real good to you.”

She stiffened and pulled them back. “Sure, I’ve known you to be a good man, Jake Braeburn, but what about Becky Caldwell? She thought *she* had a good man, but she shows up to church every Sunday with new bruises and the saddest look on her face. She was the sweetest, kindest girl to all the other children in our schoolhouse. She married just six months ago—she looked so happy that day. Her husband George works out at the Pierson ranch.” She sighed bitterly, looking down. “He glad-hands everyone on Sunday, while Becky just shrinks inside herself. And nobody does a thing about it—myself included, to my shame. We all just turn our heads away from her black eye or split lip.” Katie looked up at him with anguished eyes. “How she must *feel!* Knowing that we know, but that we don’t care enough to come to her rescue. How would you like to live like that? With no hope of rescue till the Savior Himself comes again!”

Jake stood and put his hat on his head. He turned for the door, saying, “I’ll be back for supper.”

The blessing had been said, and the food was being passed around the table.

“I went to see George and Becky,” Jake said calmly, and all movement froze. “They’re coming to Colorado. I hired them both. He’ll work with the horses, and she’ll help with the cooking for the ranch hands—both earning good wages.”

Katie, sitting next to him, was staring at him, her blue eyes huge.

“Don’t worry. I told him—right in front of her—that things were going to change. And if he had never learned how to be a good husband because he’d never known one, the Lord would forgive him—*if* he turned his life over to Him and finally treated his wife with love and respect.”

Thomas Maguire was holding the meat platter like a statue, his mouth hanging open. Katie’s mother’s eyes were filling with tears, and Phillip, her younger brother, was grinning.

Jake cleared his throat. “I told them I’d be asking Becky at the end of every week if George was being kind and gentle to her. Each time she answers yes with a genuine smile, he can stay another week. Otherwise, she stays, and he comes back here—or he can go to blazes, I said.”

There was no sound but Bridget Maguire’s sniffing.

“I told George I knew he could do it,” Jake went on. “He’s a child of God. And if Saul of Tarsus could have a change of heart, so could he. As long as the Lord was on his side, George could do anything. And when he dies, instead of his wife and children being glad of it and spitting on his grave, they would rise up and call him blessed, and they’d join him in Glory one day.” He picked up a small basket and held it toward Katie. “Biscuit?”

“Yes,” she whispered as she pushed it aside, her eyes never leaving his. “Yes, Jake, I’ll marry you.”

About the Writer

Mary Mintz was born in Poughkeepsie, New York. She worked as a secretary for the State Department in Washington, DC, and her assignments included São Paulo, Brazil, and Vienna, Austria. She then lived in Colorado for 35 years, moving to Stillwater, Oklahoma, in 2020. In 2022, she self-published a contemporary Christian romantic comedy, *Gracie's Heart's Desire*.

The Red Slippers



By Marcia N. Lynch



My brother told me that it wasn't stealing if the cherry tomatoes were on our side of our neighbor's fence. But his amendment to the 8th commandment didn't explain why we only ate tomatoes when no one was watching. It wasn't long before we were using small sticks to poke the juicy tomatoes through to our side of the fence.

The first week of August was the annual Huggins Hospital Street Fair. We always went the first night of the carnival, and I headed straight for the Rummage Sale tent. The aroma of roasted peanuts mingled with the stuffy smell of baked dust under the canvas tent. I might find Angora sweaters, old wood and rawhide snowshoes, or Victorian beaded purses. The best items were donated by the rich ladies of Sewell Road, where the freshly painted summer cottages had grass lawns sloping to the lake, in place of pine needles and sand. This treasure hunt was my delight.

Looking up at me were two cats' faces embroidered on a pair of red, felted slippers, with tiny ears and stiff whiskers. One of the

faces was indented, probably packed away for a long time, but his crooked face made me want him even more. They needed me as much as I desired them, I reasoned.

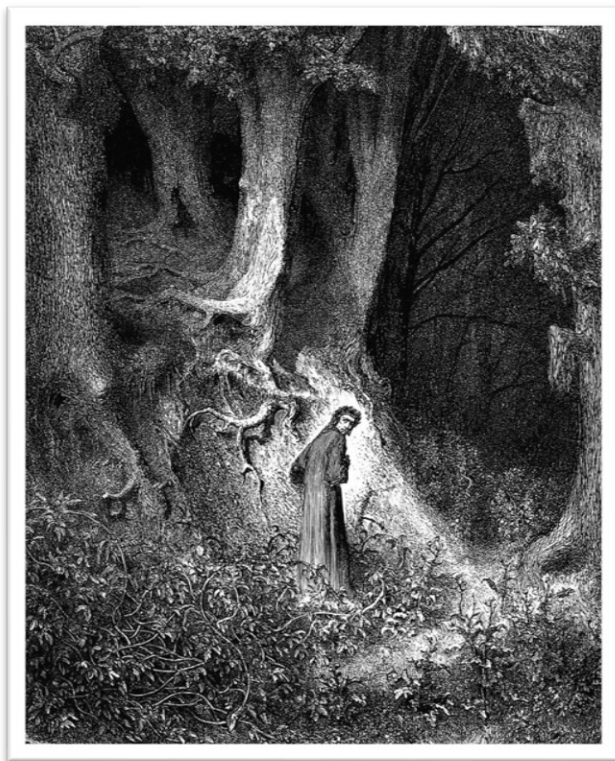
The volunteers weren't looking. I slipped through the slit in the tent, and they were mine. Except they weren't mine. I hadn't merely poked them through the fence, I had entered the garden and taken the forbidden fruit for myself. The greasy skeleton of the tilt-a-whirl glared down at me like the serpent come to life. I was a thief!

Back at our cabin, I pushed the cats under my bed. I didn't even try them on for fear that I would sprout a cat's tail and ears like poor Pinocchio in the donkey's pool hall. I tried to sleep. But, like a demon mosquito, the guilt buzzed in my ear all night. The innocent kittens had transformed into feral tabbies, and I couldn't wait to be rid of them.

The next morning, I feigned interest in going to town with Mrs. Morris so she could buy a new crossword puzzle at the Camelot bookstore—Now I had added false witness to my repertoire. She dropped me off at the Fair Grounds, and I walked the sawdust trail of repentance and poked the tomatoes back through the fence. The slippers were returned to the Rummage Sale table, and as I left the Tent of Meeting, the sleeping carnival rides were curled up and purring in the morning light.

The Darkness

By Adele Nickerson



I didn't move from underneath the tree as the sky darkened.

I leaned back and pulled my knees to my chest. I wrapped my arms around them and buried my head between my knees. I had given up. The darkness surrounded me, and I gave in to it. But then I felt His hand on my shoulder. Warmth spread into my entire body. I looked up at Him with my tear-stained face. He took me by the hand and led me through the darkness, His light leading the way.

We walked through the dark forest for a while, His light illuminating all the obstacles in our path. My heartbeat began to slow, and I leaned into Him letting his strength carry me on. Finally, we stopped at a small cottage. He led me inside and smiled before leaving me alone. Though I couldn't see him

anymore I knew He was still watching over me. I took a few deep breaths and looked out the window. The darkness was closing in so fast, I almost couldn't see the trees anymore.

I knew I'd have to keep going soon so I tried to get as much sleep as I could. When I woke up, I saw it. The book was sitting on the nightstand beside me. I picked it up and held it to my chest. I felt myself relaxing. It was time to keep going. As I stepped outside, I could feel the darkness closing in on me. But the book protected me. I pushed through the darkness and started walking. It was hard to make out the path, but the book helped me keep on the right track.

The darkness pushed back, and I just had to push harder trusting in the book. But it could only do so much for me. I lost sight of the path, and the darkness was pushing me farther and farther back. Where was He? I couldn't feel Him. I called out His name. I called for His help. After I called for a while, there He was. The darkness let up a bit, and He took my hand. His light lit up the path, and we walked together. Though I could only see Him now, somehow I knew He had been with me the whole time.

I closed my eyes and leaned into Him. Finally, He stopped. I opened my eyes, and we were at a small house at the edge of the forest. He let go of my hand and looked at me. I understood what He wanted. But I hesitated. He smiled reassuringly and took the first step with me. Then I went inside without Him. But I wasn't ever really without Him. I just thought I was. The house was smaller than the last one. I sat on the floor near the bed and took deep breaths. The book, I still clung it to my chest. As I began to relax, my breathing evened out, and some of the pain lifted from my shoulders. Soon I fell asleep on the floor.

When I woke, I was lying on the bed. The book was still on my chest. I slowly rose and headed for the door. I stepped out into the darkness and took a shaky breath. Then I turned and walked around to the other side of the house, and left the forest. I was in an open meadow. Nowhere to hide. Just me and the darkness. And the book. As I began to walk the pain came back. Worse than before. I clutched the book, putting all my faith in it to keep

me safe. But that was my first mistake. Putting my faith in an object and not in Him.

The longer I walked the harder it was to keep going. The pain spread through my chest and into the rest of my body. My legs began to quaver but I pushed forward. Soon my breath was coming in short gasps, and I could feel the tears streaming down my face. And then suddenly I wasn't in pain anymore. I was angry. I stopped walking. My body shook with anger. Anger at me. Anger at the world. Anger at Him. How could this happen? My head reeled, and I felt like I was going to explode. I called out in anger, and I threw the book far from me. And I screamed. I screamed again. Then I collapsed onto my knees and let it all out. All the anger, all the pain. It all came out in one long, loud scream.

Then I began to cry. My body racked with sobs, and I called out again. I buried my face in the grass and yelled and cried. I gripped the grass in between my fingers and yanked it out of the ground. I couldn't control it anymore. Then suddenly, I wasn't crying anymore. A strange calm washed over me. I laid on my side and pulled my knees to my chest. I closed my eyes and let the darkness close in on me. I felt it surround me, brushing my back and shoulders. I succumbed to it.

And just as it was about to claim me, I felt His hand on my back. But I couldn't move. I wanted to lean into it. But I couldn't. The darkness fell back, and He lifted me into His arms. He placed the book on my chest, and I leaned into His strength. He carried me away. I didn't know where, but I didn't care. As long as it was Him taking me there. I closed my eyes and took deep breaths letting Him do all the work.

He put me down in a soft patch of grass and watched over me while I slept. Then He lifted me into His arms again and carried me on. His light surrounded me and protected me. We walked on. Eventually, He set me down, and we walked side by side, His hand holding mine. Without my noticing He disappeared from view, but I could still feel the touch of His hand on mine.

A harsh wind blew, sending a chill up my spine. I rubbed my arms and shivered, still holding the book tight. I tried to open it to read, but it was too dark. So I pressed it against my chest and tried to recite what I could remember. I stopped at the edge of another forest. *Not again.* I took a deep breath and braced myself before I took a step inside. The wind picked up until I was trudging through it and had to fight for every step. I leaned against a tree for a moment to catch my breath. As I pushed on it felt like I wasn't making any progress.

The darkness grew until I was completely blinded. But I kept going, trusting He wouldn't let anything happen to me. My hair whipped in my face and my eyes began to sting. But then I saw a light. It was just a sliver and was gone in a second. But it gave me hope and I followed it. Then I saw it again, this time it stayed softly glowing in the distance. My grip on the book loosened as I followed the light.

As I got closer, I dropped the book and left it behind me. I didn't need it anymore. The light grew in the distance and the darkness recoiled from it. And finally, I was out of the forest. I stood in an open, lush green meadow. The sun shone bright and warmed my face. All pain, fear, and anger dissipated. And in the distance, I could see. His city, made out of gold.

And I smiled. I smiled for the first time in a long while. I could feel His presence next to me and I turned to smile up at Him. He smiled back. Then He took my hand, and we walked the rest of the way to the city together.

In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. –John 1:4-5

About the Writer

Adele Nickerson's favorite things to do are read, write, and spend time with her large family filled with lots of siblings and cousins whom she loves with her whole heart. Adele has been writing for as long as she can remember and was originally inspired by her grandmother who is a published author herself. Adele's biggest dream is to make others happy and glorify God with her work.

Artwork

By Marcia N. Lynch





Game:

Who Am I? —Poetry Edition

This game is a combination of our three favorite things: the Bible, beautiful poetry, and a good ol' fashioned challenge. Each of the following sonnets is written about a particular Bible character. Your job is to figure out who.

Once you solve these, make your own poem inspired by a person from the Bible. Start by reading about that person and jot down anything that sticks out to you. See if your parents and friends can guess who your poem is written about.

These Bible character sonnets were written by **Christine Marie Lim Magpile**.

I. The Flood of Life

I built an Ark to save the world from doom,
 And gathered pairs of every living kind.
 I followed God's command and made some room,
 For all the creatures that I could find.

But as the rain poured down and drowned the earth,
 I felt a pang of sorrow in my heart.
 For all the people who had lost their worth,
 And all the things that I had to depart.

And yet I also felt a surge of hope,
 That after this great flood, there would be peace.
 Should my descendants and I elope,
 With nature's beauty and its rich increase?

Oh, what a paradox this life can be,
A flood of death that brings new life to me.

Who am I?

II. The Covenant

In the desert's grasp, I stood as a vessel,
A shepherd tending to my flock's delight.
But within my core, a fire did ignite,
A calling, strong, that I could not wrestle.

With staff in hand, I parted the waters,
A feat so grand, a miracle untold.
Through desert heat, my people I did hold,
With faith and strength, we faced the slaughters.

Yet humbly I tread, with my head held high,
A leader chosen, through God's own decree.
The laws I received on Mount Sinai,
A covenant, binding, for all to see.

Oh, they called me a chosen one,
A prophet, a guide, the journey began.

Who am I?

III. The Wise King's Lament

I was the wisest king of Israel,
And ruled with justice, peace, and godly fear.

I built the temple where God's glory dwelled,
And wrote the proverbs for all men to hear.

But wisdom was not enough for my soul,
I craved for pleasures of the flesh and eye.
I married many women, lost control,
And worshipped idols that made God deny.

Now I am old and full of vanity,
My kingdom is divided by my son.
My riches are but dust and misery.
My fame and glory are soon to be gone.

Oh, how I wish I had been satisfied,
With God's own wisdom, and not foolish pride.

Who am I?

IV. The Reluctant Prophet's Tale

I was a prophet sent by God to warn,
The wicked city of Nineveh to repent.
But I refused to go, and fled in scorn,
And boarded on a ship that seaward went.

But God was angry, and He sent a storm,
That threatened to destroy the vessel's crew.
They cast me out, and I was swallowed by a worm,
A giant fish that in the deep sea grew.

For three long days and nights, I stayed inside,
The fish's belly. To God, I extended my hand.
He had mercy on my pride,

The fish spit me out on land.

I went to Nineveh, and preached God's word,
But still, I was still unhappy and absurd.

Who am I?

V. Father of Many Nations

I am the father of many nations,
The chosen one to bless the earth with seed.
God made with me a covenant of grace,
And asked me to obey his every deed.

I left my home and wandered in the land,
I waited long to have a son by faith.
I did not doubt God's promise or command,
But trusted him to keep me and my mate.

I faced a test that shook me to the core,
To offer up my son as a sacrifice.
I did not hesitate or question more,
But laid him on the altar in a trice.

And God was pleased with me and spared my boy,
And gave me countless offspring and much joy.

Who am I?

About the Poet

Christine Marie Lim Magpile is a teacher, book editor, and creative writer. She has a BS in Education—History (cum laude) from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila and currently finishing her MA in Araling Pilipino from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. She is a fellow of several national writers' workshops in the Philippines such as the DLSU Young Screenwriters Workshop (2023), La Salle Kritika National Workshop on Art and Cultural Criticism (2019), 6th Angono Writers' Summer Workshop (2018), and the UST National Writers' Workshop (2008).

Recipe:

Chocolate Christmas Tree Bark

Chocolate Bark is a quick and oven-free dessert that has endless possibilities. As long as you have the core ingredient of chocolate, you can experiment with dozens of different toppings, candies, and edible decor to truly make this dessert as unique as you are! This particular recipe is a “Christmas tree” version, made to look like red and green decorations on winter snow—and my son claims the pretzels and pecans make it look like actual tree bark (I can’t disagree). Two of my children and I had fun getting the toppings on as fast as we could before the chocolate hardened.

This “Chocolate Christmas Tree Bark” recipe is easy and fun and bound to get you and your family into the Christmas spirit.

Materials:

- Parchment paper (tin foil will also work)
- Baking sheet
- Microwave-safe bowl
- Rubber spatula

Ingredients:

- 8-12 oz. (about 1 to 1 ½ cups) semi-sweet chocolate chips (you can also use milk chocolate or dark chocolate)
- Mini pretzel twists
- 8-12 oz. white chocolate chips
- Toppings: red and green M&Ms, chopped nuts (we used pecans)
- Red and green food coloring (or red and green sprinkles)

Other topping ideas:

- Crushed candy canes or peppermint candy
- Crushed graham crackers
- Other salted nuts: peanuts, almonds, cashews, walnuts, etc.
- Cereal
- Mini marshmallows
- Chopped chocolate candy
- Dried fruit, such as cranberries

Steps:

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Put your semi-sweet chocolate chips in a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave for 15 seconds at a time, stirring after each time with the spatula, until the chocolate is completely melted—chocolate burns easily, so don't overcook!
3. Once melted, pour the chocolate onto the parchment paper and spread it into a thin layer with the spatula.
4. Press pretzels into the chocolate.



5. Put the baking sheet (with the chocolate and pretzels, of course) into the fridge, and let it chill for about 10-15 minutes.
6. In the meantime, wash out your microwave-safe bowl, and fill it with the white chocolate chips. Make sure all your toppings are ready to go—the white chocolate will cool quickly!
7. Microwave the white chocolate chips the same way you did with the semi-sweet chocolate—stirring every 15 seconds until they are completely melted.
8. Once melted, pour the white chocolate over your pretzel-chocolate layer, and spread evenly with the spatula.
9. Quickly add your toppings! One neat trick is to put small drops of food coloring and gently move the color around with the tip of a fork. Make sure to push down on the chunky toppings (such as the M&Ms).



10. Once you're finished decorating with your toppings, put the baking sheet back into the fridge to chill for at least 20 minutes.
11. Take the baking sheet out of the fridge, and break your bark into big chunks.

12. Enjoy your delicious Christmassy dessert! Then make some more to give as Christmas gifts to your family and friends.

Note: You can store your bark in an air-tight container in the refrigerator for up to a week.



Game: Who Am I? – ANSWERS

1. Noah
2. Moses
3. Solomon
4. Jonah
5. Abraham

Who is God?

Do you have questions about who God is? You're not alone. All of us at one time or another have wondered about the mysteries of our existence.

Here is what the Bible tells us about God:

God is real. He created the universe, the Earth, and everything in it (including you). He is the creator of life. As your creator and designer, He knows you, your mind, and your heart. He knows everything about you. He loves you (He *is* love), and He wants a relationship with you.

Here's the problem: there is distance between us and God. This separation exists because, whether we know it or not, we choose our own way of living instead of God's way. This is called sin. Sin is choosing to say, think, or do things that are against God's will. Everyone sins, without exception, and it keeps us from getting close to a good, pure, and perfect God. We cannot get rid of our sinfulness by our own efforts—not by trying to be a good person or doing good deeds. But sin must be dealt with in order for a relationship with God to begin.

So, in order to restore the broken relationship with humanity, the Author wrote Himself into His own story...

God came into His own creation, and lived as a man. As a human, He helped us to know His character and showed us how to live. He shared in our humanity, but never sinned. After teaching people about the ways of God, He allowed Himself to be falsely accused by religious leaders and arrested by Roman soldiers, then executed. He did this to make Himself a sacrifice, so that all of the sin of humanity (past, present, and future) could be placed on His shoulders and be punished once and for all.

After He died, He came back from the dead three days later. This miracle proved that He had power over life and death, and confirmed the truth of all His teachings. He told us that whoever

trusts Him will be given life—real *life*—and will one day live with Him forever in a paradise untainted by the sin that corrupts our world. He made a relationship possible again. His human name is Jesus (*Yeshua* in Hebrew). Many people often call Jesus their “savior” because He literally saves us from the consequences of sin—which are destruction, death, and separation from the love and goodness of God.

If you want to know the God who loves you, there’s nothing you have to *do*. You don’t have to go to church first and you don’t have to start making promises to be a good person. Just come to Him as you are, imperfections and all. Talk to Him, wherever you are. While you’re talking, recognize who He is. Ask Him for His forgiveness for your sins. Ask Him to take your life and make it new. And because He loves you, and because He is good, He will do just that.

Bible References:

- “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)
- “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)
- “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)
- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)
- “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)
- “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

- “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

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