

# Pure in Heart

A Literary Magazine for Families

Issue #7

May 2024



# Pure in Heart Stories

A Literary Magazine for Families  
**Issue #7 | May 2024**

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Mobile, Alabama

PURE IN HEART STORIES

Issue #7 | May 2024

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Cover Art: *Three Elements Watercolor* by Caden F. Weghorst, page 99.  
Cover design by Veronica McDonald.

## 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 — the tabs are only 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

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Welcome to Issue #7 of *Pure in Heart*!

The weather's getting warmer, school is over, and summer is in the air! After you splash in the pool, ride the waves on the beach, and eat your ice cream, be sure to take time to relax, kick your feet up, and enjoy the pages of this issue. Like

my teachers always said to us the day before summer break ... READ! We're no experts, but we believe the best way to keep your brain sharp and keep your teachers happy during these summer days is to dive into our latest collection of poems, stories, comics, and more.

In Issue #7, you'll find fun and silly poems, poems that will make you think and make you cry, and stories that will challenge you and push you to be kinder and draw closer to God. We have a new recipe to cool you off, lots of jokes to make you laugh, and a game to get to know your friends and family better. But more importantly than all of that, be sure to look for Jesus in these pages. We hope His love and amazing presence speak to you through the work of these talented kids, teens, and adults.

Thank you for reading!

May God bless you and keep you,

*Veronica McDonald*  
& *Mia McDonald*

Editors of *Pure in Heart Stories*



# Spring Becomes Summer (through a child's eyes)



**by Pat Severin**

---



The day's getting longer.  
You know what that means?  
Spring soon will be here  
With the greenest of greens!

The trees start their budding,  
Leaves soon will appear.  
Oh, boy, I can see it,  
Springtime is here!

My doggie's excited,  
*"Let's go out, right now.  
I've picked out a great spot  
Beneath that tree bough.*

*"I'll race out, just watch me.*

*It's such a prime spot.  
Oh, look, see that squirrel there?"*  
He's off like a shot!

I see in the distance,  
My favorite sight!  
A fat, little robin  
Who's just taken flight!

He's there on that branch  
Of our sycamore tree,  
The one with the swing  
My dad made for me.

I can't wait to feel it,  
The wind in my hair.  
When it blows as I'm swinging,  
I whisper a prayer.

Thank you, Dear Jesus,  
For playing outside  
With Suzy next door  
And Sharon McBride.

It sure will be nice  
Not wearing a coat!  
Spring and then summer,  
They both get my vote!

#### *About the Poet*

---

**Pat Severin**, a retired Christian teacher, is also published in such Christian magazines as the *Agape Review*, the *Clay Jar Review*, *The Way Back to Ourselves*, *Heart of Flesh*, *Vessels of Light*, *Words of the Lamb*. She is regularly featured in the SAP Anthologies and has contributed to three books.

# Winnie Pie's Walk



**by Gigi Ryan**

---



I took a walk with Winnie-Pie  
Just I and she and she and I.  
Her little hand enclosed in mine;  
Her toddler steps in tiny time.

The walk was long; the distance brief,  
She picked a flower and a leaf.  
I could have made the trip quite fast  
Were I not with the little lass.

I had to walk most patiently;  
I with her and she with me.  
This sun was bright; the day was hot,  
With Winnie though, I minded not.

She wanted me to lift her up,  
I told her she was strong enough

To walk with me just hand in hand;  
Her trusting eyes did understand.

With Father also this is true  
He holds my hand when I walk, too.  
Often is my progress slow;  
He's so very patient though.

Eventually the walk was steep  
Her feet could not the path well keep.  
So with my arms, I carried her;  
She rested in my hold, secure.

My Father is the same with me,  
Because He knows my frailty.  
He lifts me up on eagle's wings,  
And carries me through sufferings.

Winnie's walk gave exercise  
(Though she did not recognize)  
To her legs and confidence  
In her Grandma's governance.

My walks, too, are proving of  
My Father's wisdom and His love.  
And they give me practicing  
For trusting God with everything.

### *About the Poet*

---

**Gigi Ryan** is a daughter of King Jesus, wife of an amazing man, mother of nine terrific children, and grandmother of many precious little ones. She writes to encourage others to know, love, and draw near to God. You can visit her at [gigispoems.com](http://gigispoems.com).

# Thank You, God



by **Fiona Halliday**

---



Thank you, God, for all my friends.  
I'm sure that your love never ends.  
Thank you for the moon that glows,  
And the river, as it flows.

Thank you, God, that you love me,  
All the flowers, birds, and trees.  
Thank you for food and tasty treats,  
And the people that I meet.

Thank you, God, for each day.  
Thank you for the time to play.  
Thank you for the joy you bring.  
Thank you, Lord, for everything!

## *About the Poet*

---

**Fiona Halliday** is an elementary school teacher in the UK. She has been a Christian since she was 8 years old. A mother to two teenagers, Fiona enjoys sharing time with her family, reading, writing, and playing her flute.

# Miss Tilly

by Pat Severin

---



My neighbor, Miss Tilly, enjoys being silly.  
She wears her black cat 'round her head.  
The cat doesn't mind, for Miss Tilly is kind  
and so is her husband, old Fred.

When Fred plants his garden, he says, "Beg your pardon,"  
in case he disturbs Mr. Worm.  
He moves the worm over to a patch thick with clover  
and says, "There's a new spot to squirm."

Fred says from a worm we have so much to learn  
for those worms really help the plants grow.  
Aerating the soil is how the worms toil,  
so the blossoms can put on a show.



# Freddy McNickels

by Pat Severin

---



Freddy McNickels adores eating pickles.  
He loves how they pucker his lips.  
But the sound of that crunch when he ate them for lunch,  
made his little dog shake and do flips.

Freddy said he was sorry but there's more to the story.  
His little dog begged him to quit.  
Freddy loves every pickle, but he's never been fickle.  
When he promised to quit, that was it!

"I'll give up my pickles," said Freddy McNickels,  
"I love you, more than pickles for lunch."  
Freddie's house is now quiet, from his pickle-less diet.  
That's how Freddie got rid of his crunch!

Freddy McNickels missed eating his pickles  
Especially the puckers they'd bring.  
So he turned his attention to lemons, I'll mention.  
Now he puckers and that makes him sing.

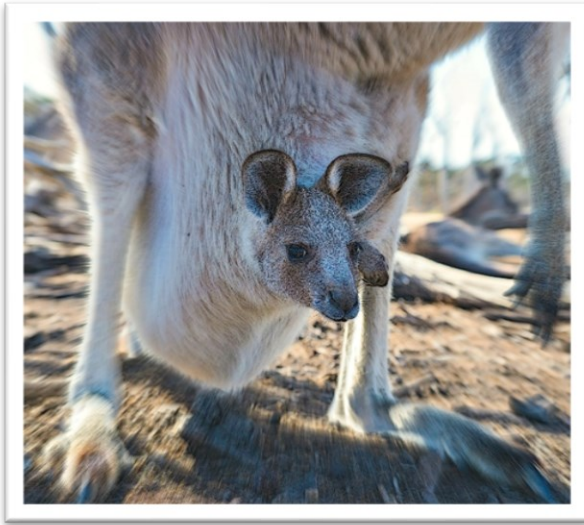
# Prayer of a Joey



**by Marcia N. Lynch**

---

It's not a stable cradle  
Jumping up and down all day.  
I peek out from my pocket  
But it's hard to see the way.  
I get dizzy seeing  
The world in disarray.  
So, swaddled in this place  
I'll pray to God on high  
Pouchsafe to keep me calm  
As life goes bouncing by.



## *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.

# Giraffe Photograph

**by Marcia N. Lynch**

---



# Bunny in the Bluebells



**by Abigail Colas, age 11**

---

I see you there  
staring, alert, listening  
to what? Let me see—

little blue dresses  
swaying in the breeze, spun by  
the Maker of life.



*"Bunny in the Bluebells" painting by Nora Meyer, age 11*

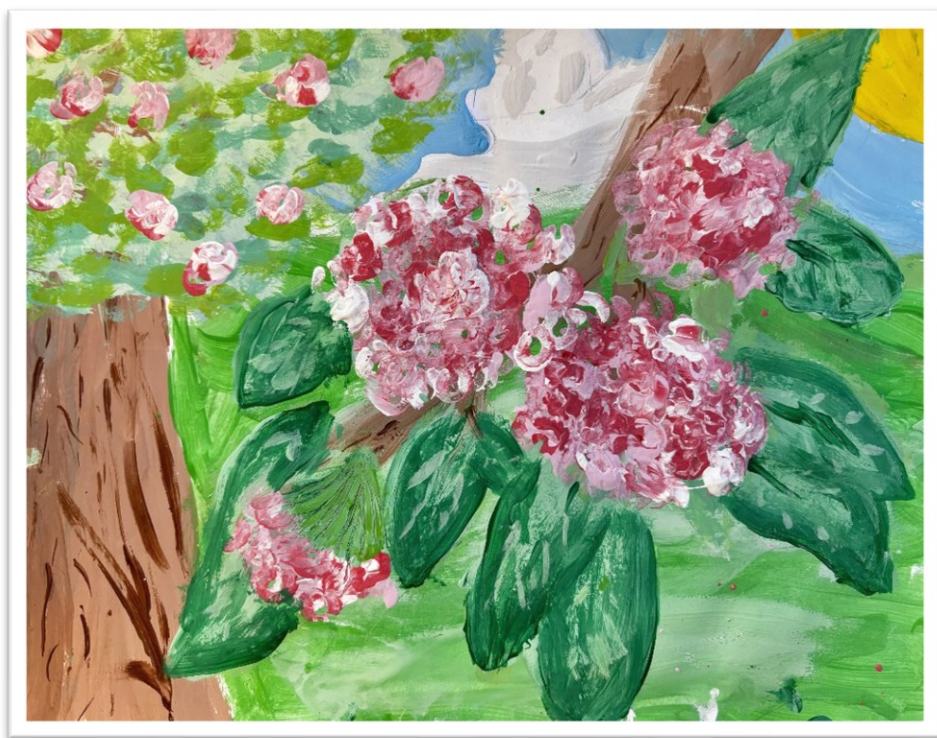
# Roots and Sky



**by Abigail Colas, age 11**

---

As I am planted,  
I am nothing but a seed.  
As I am watered,  
I start to grow, peeking  
my head through  
the ground.  
As the sun shines  
on me, I reach  
for the sky  
stretching up  
to the top  
of what,  
I do not know  
and when I'm there  
what will I find?  
I hope a cloud,  
a big blue sky,  
a tree so tall—  
I wish I could fly.

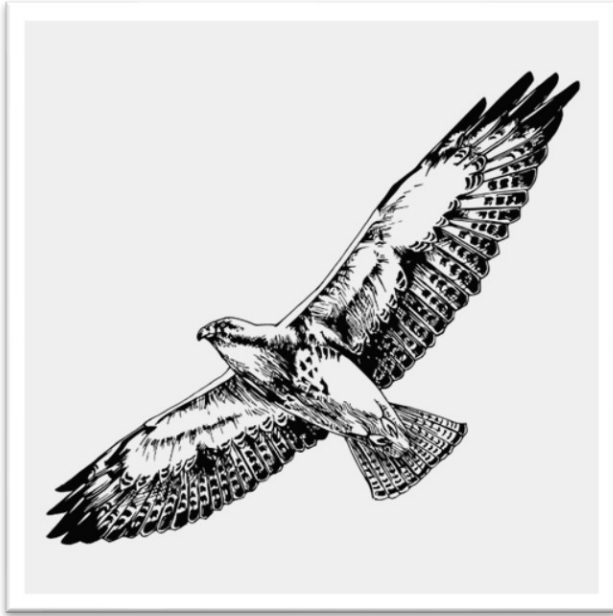


"Roots and Sky" painting by Nora Meyer, age 11

# Eagle

by Camilla Yslas, age 9

---



I saw an eagle soaring high,  
Flying by every eye.  
His noble wings spread so wide  
With pride as he glides.  
All of these things show God's might,  
And light that shines bright.

# The Farm

by Elijah Hong, age 11

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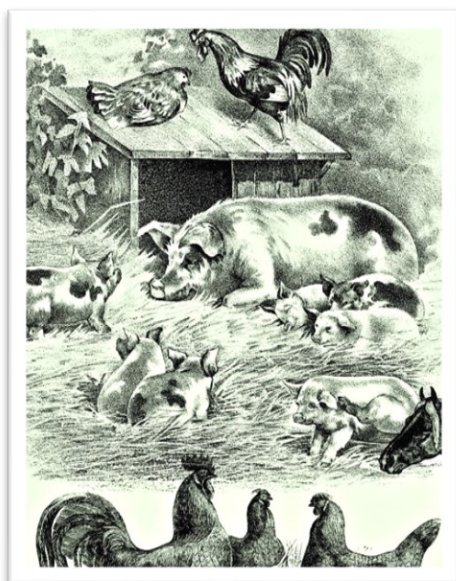


Up in the hayloft the chicken sits on her eggs.  
The cows wait to be milked at dawn.  
Old saddles and bridles sit silently on pegs  
As the barn cat stalking the farm lets out a yawn.

The pigs frolic and play in warm mud below  
As the work horses rattle their long sleek metal chains.  
The lean, old farmer rises to harvest and sow.  
The hired man quietly whistles and pulls the reins.

The tractor rumbles up the steep hill in the lane.  
As the tiring day slowly comes to an end,  
A rabbit loudly rustles through some sugar cane.  
Then, the sunset comes, bringing an awesome orange  
blend.

The farm once again is quiet and peaceful today  
As the dim candles slowly start to fade away.



Bird



**by Elijah Hong, age 11**

---

**B**lissfully singing in the mornings,

**I**nstinctively gathering her chicks under her wings.

**R**ound the farm she goes,

**D**ancing to and fro in the sunshine.

# Hold Fast



by **Marcia N. Lynch**

---

Faithful, mighty Humpback  
Whose promises are true,  
Swims with the humble barnacle  
Who sticks to him like glue.  
Touring through the ocean depths,  
Rising to breach the dawn,  
This small, unsightly barnacle  
Goes where few have gone.  
The glue is his confession  
In the whale's faithfulness.  
And though he has no tail or fins,  
He dives with righteousness.



# Walkin' on the Water



**by Ada Anne Ohnezeit**

---

My Pastor told the story  
from old Bible history,  
How Simon Peter saw his Savior  
Walking on the sea.  
And moved by great emotion  
For this "Man who knew no sin,"  
With wondrous faith, he left the boat  
To "walk the walk" with Him.

I'm walkin' on the water,  
With my eyes upon the Lord,  
For He will never fail me  
While I'm trusting in His word.  
He will keep me steady  
Though the billow's pull is strong.  
I must not lose my focus  
Oh, so quickly I'd go wrong!

I'm walkin' on the water,  
And I'm trying to be brave,  
For it will take just one misstep  
To sink me in the wave.  
One minute for my mind to stray  
To the sinful life I had,  
One second's doubt to risk my soul  
And make my Savior sad.

Yes, I'm walkin' on the water  
With my eyes upon my Lord.  
Oh, give me strength to never fail  
The promise of His word.

Please let me, with my Master,  
 Walk the surface of the sea  
 In joy, while Jesus leads the way  
 To Heaven, our destiny.



### *About the Poet*

**Ada Anne Ohnezeit**, born in 1925, is a lifelong resident of Western Pennsylvania, and has been reading and writing poetry since her youth. Throughout her life, Ada has written many short, humorous verses for friends and family and longer compositions about life, death, family, faith, nature, and holidays. These works have been enjoyed only by loved ones of all ages and the church community as she has never submitted her work for publication until now in her 99<sup>th</sup> year. These works submitted were chosen out of 64 currently ready for review.

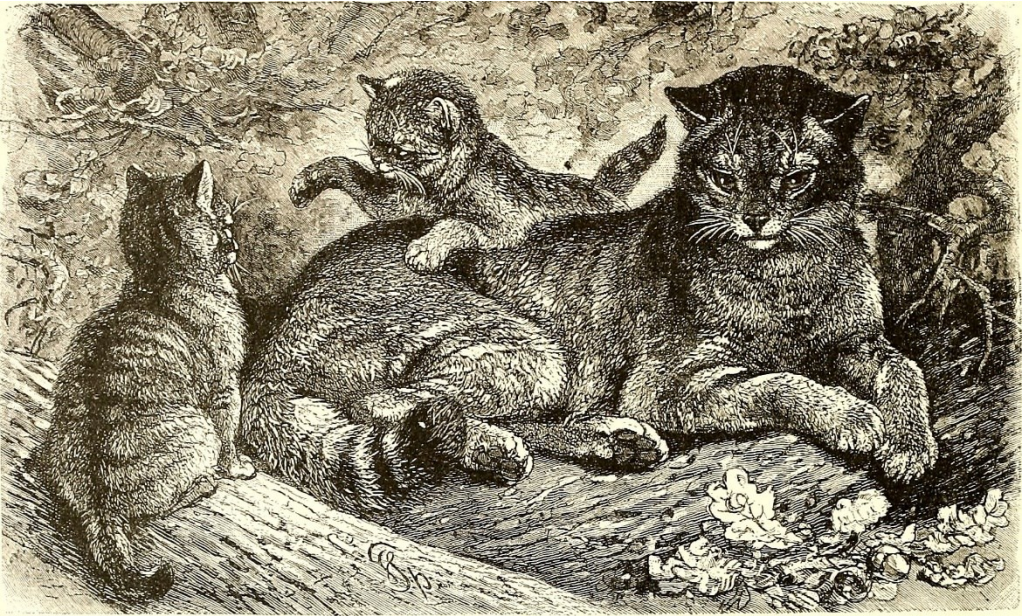
Ada has recently filmed two volumes of her poetry for her church and has been traveling to other local churches to read. She is currently writing and revising work to prepare for a third. Ada's recorded works can be found in the YouTube playlist ["The Poetry of Ada A. Ohnezeit"](#).

## Barn Cat

**by Paul Kaddis, age 12**

---

As the morning dawns  
And the sun shines  
A baby kitten lets out a whine  
The mother cat  
In the farm  
Starts to chat with a nearby rat  
One of the many activities  
Is to find food  
As the cat runs back  
It jumps for milk from the cow  
As the farmer is milking it  
It tramples the gardens  
Passes the pigs  
Jumps from the horses  
Avoids the twigs  
Picks up some hay  
Licks the water  
Runs through the shade  
Returns to the kitten  
Feeds it food  
Nighttime comes  
Through the cold  
They curl up  
On their bed  
Darkness approaches  
And they fall asleep  
In the morning  
They awake  
To see the sunshine  
Shine through the cracks



# If To Be Young Again



**by Paul Kaddis, age 12**

---

If To Be Young Again, meant to slide again, If  
To Be Young Again, meant to sigh again, If To  
Be Young Again, meant to cry again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to play again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to care again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to try again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to start again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to run again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to find again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to grow again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to sleep again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to excite again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to lie again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to imagine again, If To Be  
Young Again, meant to be me, Then I choose  
that

# God Loves Her So

## by Georgia Elliott, age 13

---



She was only barely five  
And I remember I was three  
When the Lord our Jesus Christ  
Took her to be not with us, but with He

I am sad for the people she left  
Now that she is laid to rest  
Still, it's almost like a theft,  
Out of us she was the best

I like to think God loves her so  
He wanted her closer to Him  
It was still so hard to let her go  
With her name memories come in

The sinking feeling in my chest  
The hollow empty place  
When all the feelings come up to rest  
There simply isn't enough space

Still, I find a question lurking  
In the corners of my mind;  
If I spent all my time working  
On praying, why isn't she alive?

But she is more alive than ever  
Alive in Christ, alive in God  
She is in perfect absolute splendor  
God lifted her from Satan's rod

We prayed that she would be healed



From the sickness that she had  
And to our prayers, Lord God appealed  
In a way that makes us sad

I'm sorry you're not here with us  
But I will see you soon  
When I ride that heaven-bound bus  
Danica, bravery is you.

# Off the Streets

**by Fernando Guerrero, age 12**

---



My dad met my canine friend at his job  
In the cold rain, he got home in the day  
He was freezing and his fur was in a glob  
We washed all the dirt off and far away

Jumping all day very high up and down  
With a cry you could hear from afar  
Interested in all the crazy sights and sounds  
We can hear him when driving up in our car

With the cutest most adorable smile  
He is dumb but at the same time very smart  
There is nothing about him that is vile  
He likes to run back and forth like a dart

A very playful dog and I'm glad he's my pal  
He is always increasing our morale



# My Heart



**by Nila K. Bartley**

---

Who has my heart?  
The One who has loved me from the start.

His name is King of kings and Lord of lords.  
Because of Him, my heart is clean, and heaven is my reward.

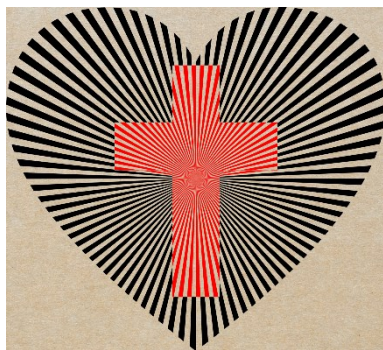
His name is the One who makes the stars and calls them by  
name.  
Since He came into my heart, I am not the same.

His name is the One who prays to the Father for me.  
The wonders He has done in my heart have set me free.

His name is the One who heals my broken heart.  
He healed my heart because I am His child, and as His child I  
have been set apart.

His name is the One who sits on the throne.  
Because my heart is His, I will never be alone.

His name is Jesus!



## *About the Poet*

---

**Nila K. Bartley** is in her late fifties and lives in Ohio. She is married to her forever love, Jason. She volunteers at her church. Her writing ability is a talent from God, and she serves Him with it. Her hope and prayer is that people are blessed by what she writes.

# Words



**by Robyn Czereszko**

---



You can't taste them or smell them or stack them on a chair  
You can't weigh them or touch them or throw them in the air  
But Words Are Powerful!

They can make you feel like you're twenty feet tall  
That nothing can stop you, no nothing at all  
They can make you feel loved  
They can make you feel brave  
They can give you the courage to face a new day  
That is what kind words can do.

But words that are cruel or snarky or rude  
Or sneaky or spiteful or thoughtless or crude  
These words make you feel unimportant and small  
They can make you believe no one loves you at all  
They can fill you with fear  
They can fill you with pain  
They can leave on your heart a dark, lingering stain.

So carefully think on the words that you speak  
Choose words that bring hope; words that strengthen the weak

Your words have great power and now that you know  
Use those words to fight darkness wherever you go!

#### *About the Poet*

---

**Robyn Czereszko:** I'm a lifelong Hoosier and have a BA and MA from Indiana University in English Literature and Applied Linguistics, respectively. I'm a follower of Jesus and a voracious reader who appreciates the life-changing power of words.

# Art From Within



**by Ruby Grace Guerrero, age 14**

---

Oh, how art can be so peaceful and very calm.  
You can paint the blue sky, green grass or falling rain.  
But it can also help cope with a mournful loss.  
But it doesn't matter in your creative brain.

You can make fairy tales and stories with your art.  
Some show where it can go tragic or end with love.  
You can draw to find uncharted parts of your heart.  
And you can even paint God's promise up above!

You can paint with any brush, either big or small.  
Art comes in many ways; you need to find your style!  
You can even use brushes to recreate fall.  
Any art you do, I'm sure it can make one smile.

Oh, how Art can be so colorful and divine.  
Oh, how art can make your life bright and make it shine.



# Lessons from Grandpa



**by Nila K. Bartley**

---

Grandpa took the fish, leftover bait, and tackle,  
We started walking and went past the chapel—

We would be there Sunday I knew,  
To be anywhere but the small country chapel just would not do.

My grandpa had been pastor there many years ago.  
Since then, he had been teaching me to give the Lord all my cares  
and woe.

Grandpa said Jesus carried all that on the cross just for me—  
Sin, sickness, and cares, Jesus carried it so I could be free.

My grandpa was a very special man.  
He taught me that the Bible says be kind to others whenever you  
can.

The first thing Grandpa told me though was about how God loves  
me beyond measure;  
He said the Lord views me as His treasure,

A treasure worth so much that God the Father gave His Only Son.  
Yes, Jesus is the One.

These many lessons and others I learned on Grandpa's knee.  
He was the first one to tell me why Jesus died on that tree.

I look back with fondness and gratitude on those days;  
For now, with my own children, I am repeating Grandpa's ways.



# Mother's Nest

by **Lisa C Reynolds & Vivienne Bretherick**

---

mother  
feeding her young -  
nest at my window



© Lisa C Reynolds  
Vivienne Bretherick, Artist

## About the Poet & Artist

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**Lisa C Reynolds** is a poet from Durham Region, Ontario.

**Vivienne Bretherick** is a visual artist, living east of Toronto, Ontario.

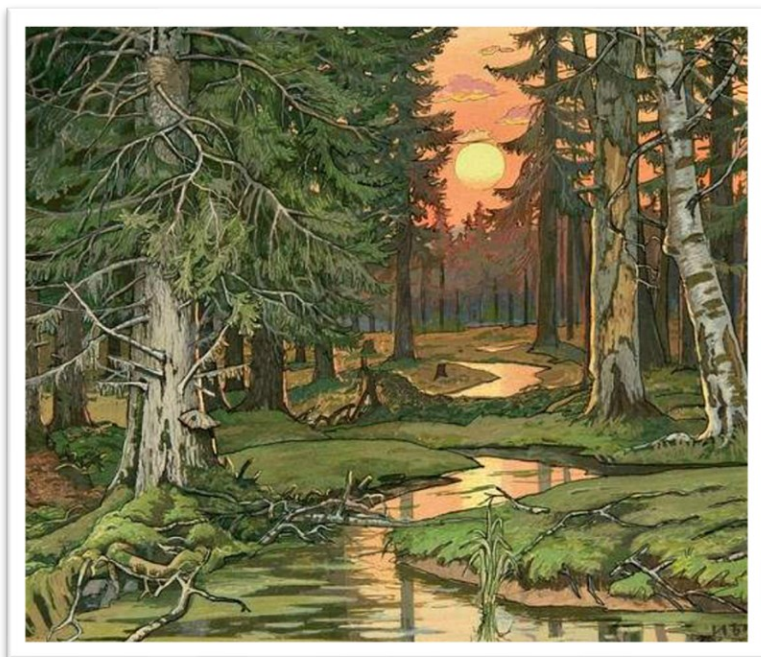
# Forest



**by James Yslas, age 13**

---

Wind gently rustling through the trees,  
I get a sense of great tranquility,  
Oh, what a pleasure it is to see thee,  
Woods as far as I am able to see,  
What a great joy this is that costs no fee,  
I hear the sound of the ducks a-calling,  
I smell the huge towering pine trees' scent,  
And not a single raindrop is falling,  
I have a feeling of great merriment,  
I look up and see the great blue sky,  
And I see the things that others have missed,  
I see the birds soaring up very high,  
And I am in awe to know that God has made this.



# By the Breath of His Mouth (Psalm 33)

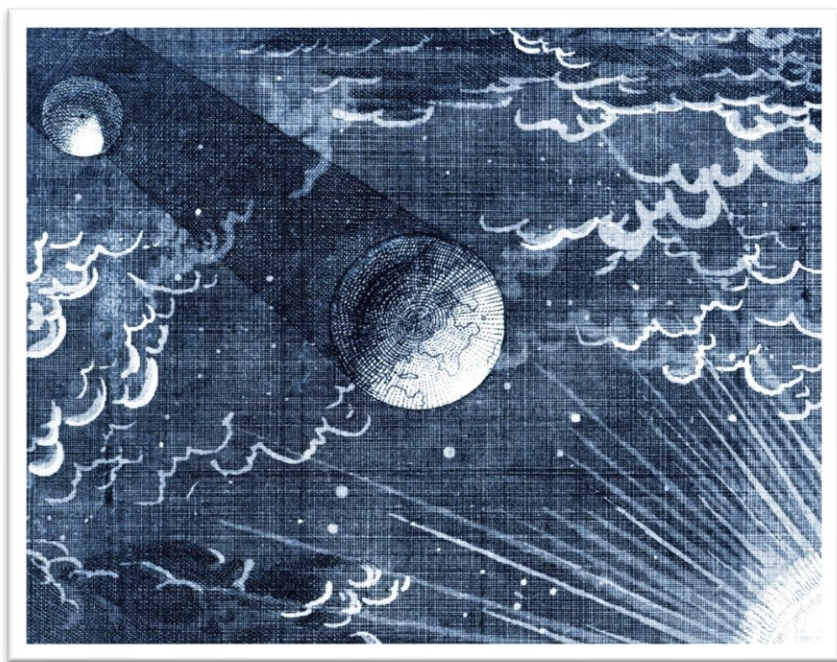


**by Suzy Haines**

---

He speaks and His breath contains the stars—  
they scatter with every word.

His words fill the earth, His stars fill the sky—  
the Lord is both seen and heard.



# Remarkable

by Suzy Haines

---



Remarkable. God,  
who sees me, who knows me,  
founder of earth  
where I walk and breathe,  
giver of gifts, both great and small,  
lover of me, lover of all,  
asking for nothing in return  
but a word of thanks, and  
—oh yes—  
my soul.

# Stitches



**by Emily Brown, age 16**

---

Lately I've been learning with a needle and a thread.  
I've been sewing on the sofa and embroidering in bed.  
I've been thinking about how the ending picture can't be seen  
Until every little thread is right where it should have been.

The Lord has planned the stitches in the fabric of my life—  
The light for love and laughter, and the dark for pain and strife.  
Sometimes the needle pierces, but the end result will be  
A beautiful creation, as our eyes so soon will see.

Too much the stitches seem to us unplanned and out of place,  
Yet a work of art emerges, and it's filled with wondrous grace.  
So many times we stab ourselves and try to take control—  
But see, he has a plan for us, we will be finished, whole!

A portrait comes with patience and a tapestry takes time.  
He is all the strength you need for the mountains you will climb.  
You are not forgotten, even when it seems 'unfair.'  
You are handmade by the Maker, and your life is planned with care.

## About the Poet

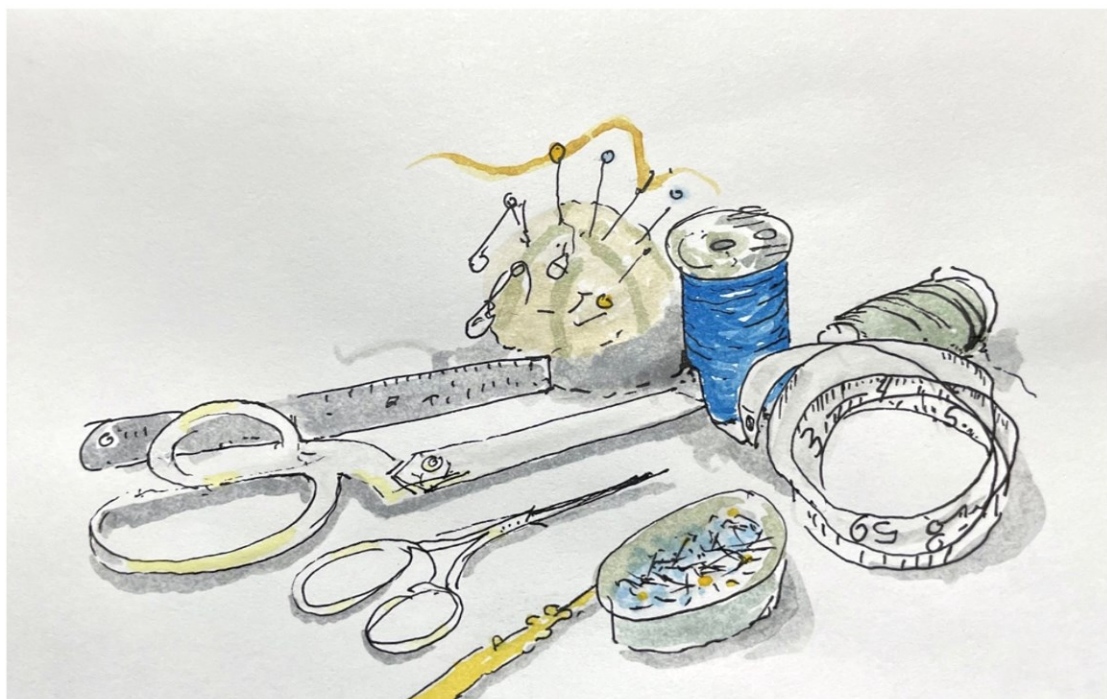
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**Emily Brown** is a teen author, poet, and singer/songwriter from Australia. She has so far been published in the *Write the World Review* as well as here in *Pure in Heart Stories*. You can also find her on YouTube under the stage name Emmi Byrd, where she hopes to glorify God and encourage listeners through her music and lyrics.

# Artwork

by **Marcia N. Lynch**

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Read about **Marcia N. Lynch** on page 20.

# A Ticklish Situation



by **Marcia N. Lynch**

---



A Ticklish Situation drawing by **Marcia N. Lynch**.

Her hat was pheasantly plom'd  
While the man behind her was doomed,  
To be tickled at lunch  
While she hadn't a hunch  
As laughter took wing through the room!

# The Church Choir



by **Timothy Horne**

---

Voices meshing, weaving, blending  
Music soaring, stirring, mending  
In unison or harmony  
Those listening can all agree  
The unique sounds of diverse voice  
Inspire and make the heart rejoice  
As timbres rise  
And some descend  
Our hope? All eyes  
t'ward heaven bend  
While lyrics hint of love sublime  
And chords, a unity divine.



## About the Poet

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**Timothy Horne** was born in England in 1957 and raised in Canada. He surrendered his life to Jesus in his early 20's and has dedicated it to serving Him in various settings, many years in both prison ministry and as a missionary in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

# Lyre



**by Eris Cardin, age 17**

---

I pluck the notes to raise a song.  
Awake, my lyre! We will wake the dawn.  
The music stirs an answ'ring chord:  
Oh, soul, awake! We will praise the Lord.

The gold strings quiver with a sound;  
Like sweetened thunder it rebounds.  
To heaven then the rhythms flow—  
Awake, my love, and in this grow.

My faltering hand caressed the strings,  
My murmured voice the low note sings;  
My fingers still upon the chord,  
But my heart echoes, "Bless the Lord!"



# The Quiet Place



**by Eris Cardin, age 17**

---

In my closet room—the outer sounds are very loud tonight,  
Battering against the door, requesting for my ear;  
From the outer world of chaos I recently took flight,  
And I do not wish to grant it entrance to me here.

In the rosy glow of peacefulness, I settle on the floor,  
Pull my knees up to my chest and clasp my trembling hands,  
Firmly settling with my back against the sturdy closet door,  
Paying no attention to the chaos sound's demands.

In the quiet place of prayer the tumult slowly fades away,  
And I am left abandoned by my worries and my fears;  
In the quiet place—away from all the cares of night and day,  
Where my shame contains no meaning, where I cry no tears.

In the quiet place, I sense His presence as a joyful light,  
And I see the glory of His beauty and His peace.  
And I know without my King my joy would fade to deepest night,  
But in His embrace is every freedom, full release.

In His presence now I kneel and bow myself unto the floor,  
I rejoice in worship, and I yearn to kiss His feet,  
And prostrated as I am, He lifts my spirit up to soar:  
In my King, my heart is strong, my thoughts are pure and sweet.

In communion indescribable His Spirit meets my spirit,  
And so in my worship unmolested I rejoice.  
Pouring out my heart, I yield myself to Him, and then I hear it,  
Gentle as the softest breeze, as quiet as the room: His voice.

Sweeter far than any singing that has fallen on my ear,  
Fairer far and gentler than any human voice,  
Deep within my spirit's hungering depths His words of love I hear,  
Stirring up my heart to thrill and worship and rejoice.

Words of deepest mercy, words of peace, and words of matchless grace:  
Soft and sweet, my soul is soothed, my heart consoled,  
And I have the strength to rise and leave my precious, quiet place,  
Face the outer world with my Lord's stillness in my soul.

# Weight of Glory

## by Eris Cardin, age 17

---



Pain and peace together,  
Tears and hope combined.  
How could I despair  
Knowing what is mine?  
Glory is forever;  
Pain and tears will cease.  
Finite days of care,  
Everlasting peace.

### About the Poet

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**Eris Cardin** is a young poet and writer who is ardently passionate about writing and particularly poetry. Her poems have been previously published in *Faith on Every Corner*. She also has an email list where she shares regular writing updates, short stories, and poetry. You can sign up at <https://sendfox.com/shardsofrhythmanddreams>.

# Hope

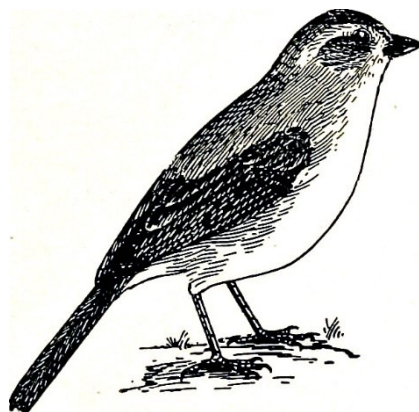


by Jane Murton-Armer

---

This morning when I woke  
My shattered heart was cold.  
A tiny little piece of me  
Had broken from my soul.

My empty painful thoughts  
Lay strewn across the floor.  
I didn't want to see the mess,  
My eyes were red and sore.



I opened up my Bible;  
The windless sky was grey.  
I prayed, "Oh Lord, my ocean's dry,  
My river's run away."

A sparrow landed on my sill,  
And I began to see.  
The fountain that I thought was dry  
Is full and running free.

That simple little bird  
Was the healing of my sorrow.  
My comfort lay there in God's word,  
A bright and clear tomorrow.

## About the Poet

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**Jane Murton-Armer** lives with her family in the far north of Scotland. She has numerous poems published and is currently writing a novel. She starts a master's degree later this year and is looking forward to the challenge.

# David

by Karen Townsend



You never imagined  
 out there on the hills  
 defending the sheep in battles against bears  
 that one day you'd pick up five smooth stones  
 and hurl one at God's enemy  
 to shut his blaspheming mouth  
 Never dreamed  
 God would choose you  
 from a lineup of brothers  
 you'd been trying to emulate all your life  
 Didn't expect  
 to be on the run for years  
 waiting for His timing  
 Or that you'd inspire so many to follow you  
 just by being yourself  
 Bold, courageous, sensitive  
 You lived in vibrant color  
 a full-ranged life

of emotion, strength, weakness, grief  
A mixed bag  
full of contradiction and passion  
but always after His own heart

---

*About the Poet*

**Karen Townsend** explores the deep sea of the human psyche through speculative fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. She has an MFA in Creative Writing and a hunger to build creative community in Virginia where she explores personality theory and looks for her next adventure.

# Spring Poppy Superbloom



**by Michael Shoemaker**

---

Granny counted turtles for the State of California  
and was always good with numbers  
a bookkeeping graduate of Pima Academy  
in southeastern Arizona.

She would take me on visits to my Uncle George's  
through what I always thought was the Great California Desert  
although I never really knew the real name  
being young enough that nobody expected me to know anything.

One day on the drive, she pulled over the car.  
We got out and Granny pointed to a hill.  
“What do you see?” she asked.  
Nervous that she would not like my answer,  
I said, “Nothing, I mean dirt, no nothing.” She smiled.

At George's, I slept in the upper bunk in my cousin Cordy's room.  
I couldn't get to sleep with him wanting to talk and talk,  
a country boy wanting to say something to a city visitor.  
The rain pounded the metal roof all night, harder than I had ever known.  
It was enough for the desert to take back part of the road.

On the way back, Granny stopped, and we faced the same hill.  
Something new, a sea of California poppies, thousands—millions  
a renewed promise after the flood of yellow-orange goodness  
blanketed the hillside with simple majesty  
that made my skin tingle.

I had heard of the Throne of God and thought  
poppies must be the color of this Throne.

Granny asked once again, “What do you see?”  
waiting for my answer, breathing in the desert life.

“I see heaven, just heaven, Granny, don’t you?”  
She smiled the biggest smile showing nearly all her teeth.

Granny appeared pleased with my response.  
I wonder how I can get to count turtles for a living.



### *About the Poet*

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**Michael Shoemaker** is a poet, writer, and photographer. His writing has appeared in *Blue Lake Review*, *Front Porch Review*, and in anthologies at *Poetry Pacific* and *Pure Slush*. He lives in Magna, Utah with his wife and son. He is the author of *Rocky Mountain Reflections* (Poets’ Choice, 2023).

# Four Photographs

by **Michael Shoemaker**

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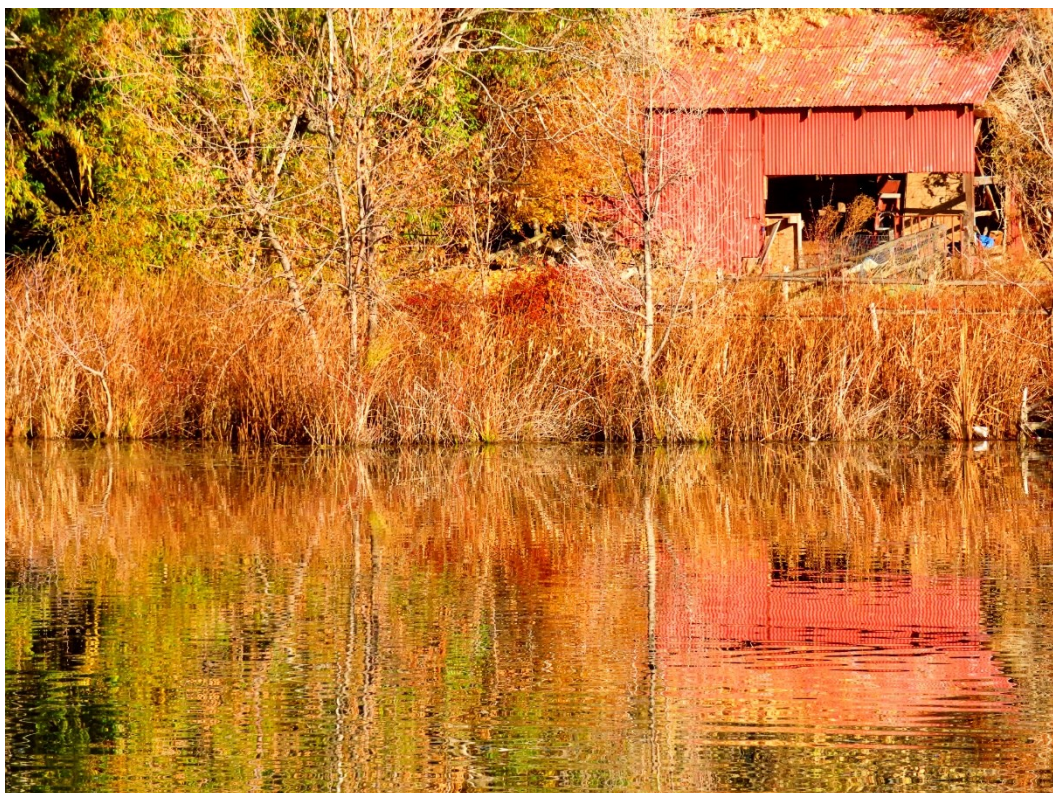
## Spring Meadow



## Fishing Pond Dreamscape



## Shed's Reflection



## Coming Storm



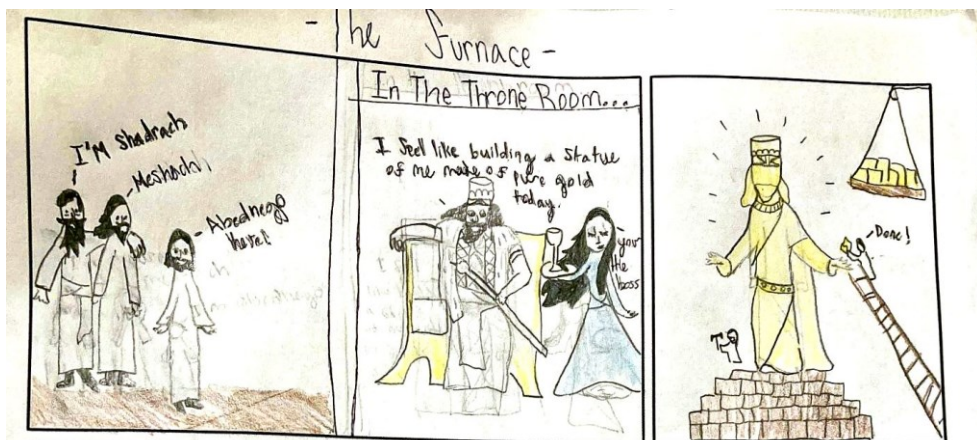
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Read about **Michael Shoemaker** on page 60.

# Comic

by Mia McDonald, age 11

## The Furnace



**Man 1:** I'm Shadrach.

**Man 2:** Meshach.

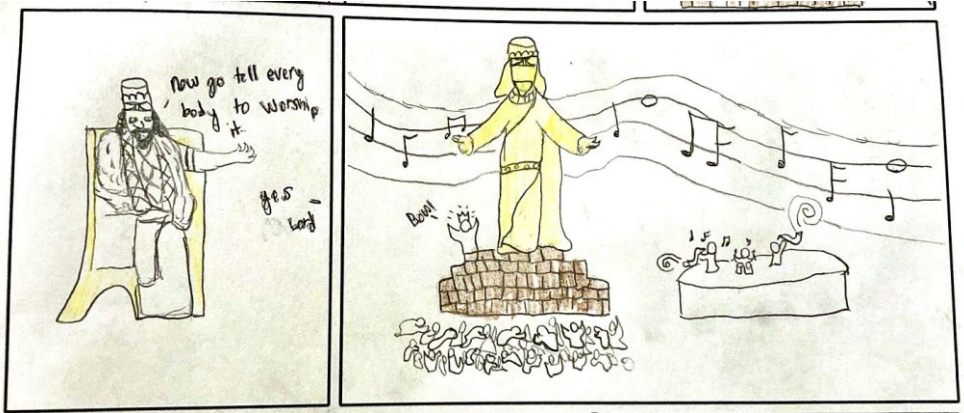
**Man 3:** Abednego here!

**King:** I feel like building a statue of me made of pure gold today.

**Servant:** You're the boss.

**Builder:** Done!

Continue >>



**King:** Now go tell everybody to worship it.

**King's Servant:** Bow!

**Servant:** Yes, Lord.



**King:** I'll give you one last chance.

**Shadrach:**

Nope.

**Meshach:**

Nuh-uh.

**Abednego:** Not gonna happen.

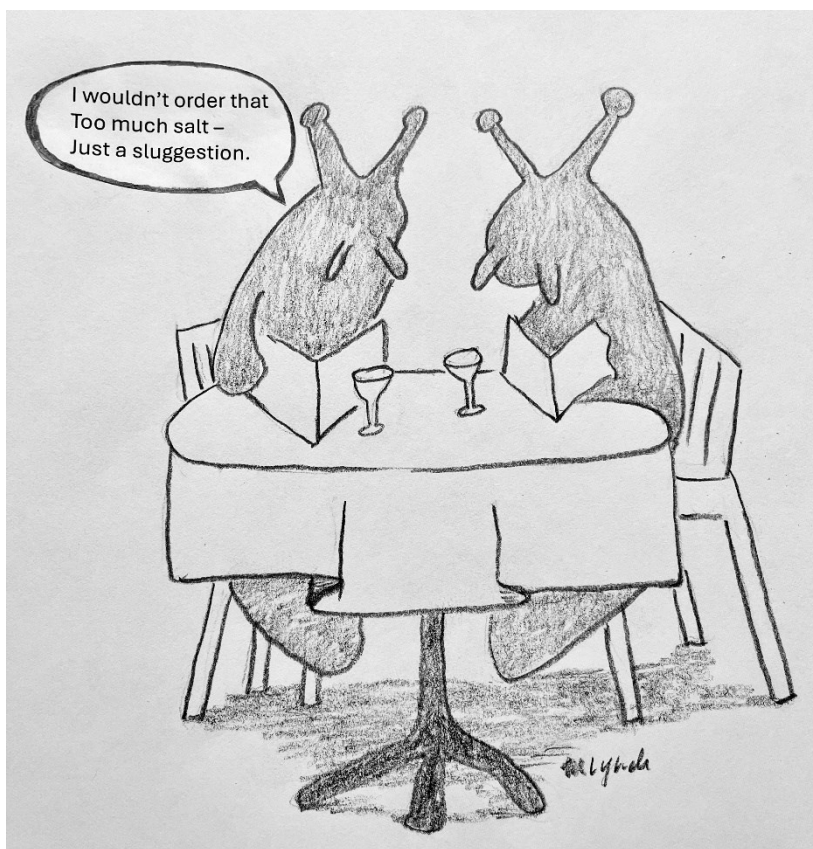
**King:** Cast them in!

**King:** They are unharmed!  
Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!

## Comic

by **Marcia N. Lynch**

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Read about **Marcia N. Lynch** on page 20.

## Two Jokes

by John H. Kishler, age 13

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### Joke #1

**Man calling a Christian magazine editor:** “Hello, I have some words to say about your magazine.”

**Editor:** “Do you have some problem with the magazine? Do you find anything well ... bad about it?”

**Man:** “Don’t get me wrong, I love it. But with every edition, I always find an issue with it.”



### Joke #2

**Q:** Why didn’t Noah bring seals in his boat?

**A:** Because the seals already had an *AWRK!*

# Household Favourite Jokes

**by Emily Brown, age 16**

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## Joke #1

*(credit to my Uncle Daniel for teaching us this one)*

**Q: What do a shark and a grape have in common?**

**A:** They're both purple. Except for the shark.

---

## Joke #2

*(I made this one up a few years ago)*

**Q: What do you get when you cross a town and a city?**

**A:** Sore legs.

---

## Joke #3: The Squirrel Joke

*(This one is a long story joke, so it merits a title. Credit to my Uncle Jako for this one—that was one of the least boring car trips I've been on.)*

Continue >>

In a treehouse in the forest, there lived a family of squirrels: Mummy Squirrel, Daddy Squirrel, and Teenage Squirrel.

They all lived happily in their treehouse—until one day, Daddy Squirrel came into Teenage Squirrel's room after saying goodnight and saw him disappearing out of his bedroom window on a long piece of rope, with a backpack.

Daddy Squirrel didn't tell Mummy Squirrel because he didn't want to worry her. But he did want to know where Teenage Squirrel was going. So the next day, he went to the squirrel hardware store and bought himself a rope.

That night, he waited around the corner to Teenage Squirrel's bedroom, until he heard the faint and barely audible sound of the window being opened, and then he crept into the room, looked around to make sure Teenage Squirrel couldn't see him, then threw his rope out the window as well, and followed Teenage Squirrel out.

He watched as Teenage Squirrel made his way through the forest, all the way to a river. This must be where he's going, Daddy Squirrel thought.

But no—Teenage Squirrel reached into his backpack, pulled out an inflatable raft, and paddled across the river to the other side.

The next day, Daddy Squirrel went to the squirrel hardware store and bought himself an inflatable raft, and a backpack to keep it in.

That night, he followed Teenage Squirrel out of the treehouse, through the forest, and across the river. He watched as Teenage Squirrel got to a big patch of fast-growing bamboo. This must be where he's going, Daddy Squirrel thought.

But no—Teenage Squirrel reached into his backpack and pulled out a machete. He hacked through the fast-growing

bamboo, and before Daddy Squirrel could follow him in, the bamboo had grown and covered up his path.

The next day, Daddy Squirrel went to the squirrel hardware store and bought a machete. That night, he followed Teenage Squirrel out of the treehouse, through the forest, across the river, and through the fast-growing bamboo ... all the way to a steep cliff.

Surely this must be where he's going, Daddy Squirrel thought.

But no—again, Teenage Squirrel reached into his backpack and pulled out a grappling hook. He hooked it up to the top and then started climbing down.

The next day was a Saturday, and the squirrel hardware store was closed for the weekend. But on Monday, Daddy Squirrel went to the squirrel hardware store and bought a grappling hook.

That night, he followed Teenage Squirrel out of the treehouse, through the forest, across the river, through the fast-growing bamboo, and down the cliff. All the way to a deep, dark cave. Daddy Squirrel walked into the cave and found Teenage Squirrel, along with a HUGE pile of nuts.

He frowned. “Son, what are you doing?”

Teenage Squirrel froze, finally realizing he'd been followed.

He looked up, and at last responded.

“Nutting.”

# The Poo-Footed Rabbit Rescuer



by Bryant Burroughs

---



All the creatures who dwell in the little woods and pond love the man who visits every day, quietly walking their paths as if he knows all who live there are shy. Indeed they are shy, yet they welcome his visits.

The owls and hawks and crows revel in their lookout role, and it's a high honor to be the first to spot the man as he approaches the woods. When they spot him, all the birds fly with joy to alert the creatures of the woods and pond to come out of their nests and hiding places and come near the path where the man and the Black Beast walk.

All creatures have names, and the day came that the council met to bestow a name on their beloved visitor.

“We must name him The Nut,” chirp the Squirrels, jerking their tails in excitement. “Because he brings us nuts and cereal to eat.”

Standing on her hind legs, the spokes-bunny for the rabbits announces, “We’ve conferred and suggest his name be Big Bunny Without Ears.”

“Frog Who Stands Tall,” croaks the giant bullfrog, who is revered as the oldest creature in the forest.

“We propose Deer-Stepper,” grunt the bucks and does and fawns. “He steps so quietly and then freezes when he spots us. He walks like us.”

After a few minutes of chirping and cawing in the tops of the trees, the birds send a bright red cardinal gliding to the ground to trill their decision: “The best name by far is The One Who Sings Almost as Well as a Bird.”

The Pond Pigeon has waited until the last to speak. From the shallows of the pond, she exclaims, “My friends, I stand perfectly still, yet he spots me every time. Then he sings to me! To me! I memorize the song he sings so that I can sing it to my children one day.”

Everyone was quiet, for they still mourned the loss of her mate.

Then one of the red squirrels inquires, “What then shall we call our visitor? We have many good names, but we haven’t agreed yet.” Even the wise bullfrog is puzzled, for each of the proposed names is good and proper. Then his wide mouth smiles. In a single jump, he joins the rabbit clans. “Bunji,” he calls, “tell us about your adventure early this morning.”

A shy, half-grown bunny steps from the other rabbits, and hesitantly squeaks out his story. “I know I’m too young to be out all night, but I found good forage at the edge of the forest. All was quiet and dark ... and safe, I thought. Then the Black Beast emerged from the darkness and set upon me. I was scared, but I zigged and zagged as fast as I could. I could feel the heat of its breath.”

All the animals listen in shock, for the bunny Bunji is describing their worst nightmare. “What happened?” asks a squirrel. “How did you escape?”

Bunji is trembling as he remembers his fear. “Our friend, the Big Bunny Without Ears, dashed out of nowhere and with his words stopped the Black Beast. I was able to flee here to safety.”

The animals emit a collective exhale as they marvel at his story. “But wait, there’s more,” Bunji adds. “I heard him speaking to me.”

“What did he say? Tell us! What did he say?”

“He said, ‘Shoot! I’ve stepped in poo!’”

### *About the Author*

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**Bryant Burroughs** is the author of a poetry collection, *Where Do My Words Go?* His poems and short stories have appeared in literary sites such as *Foreshadow*, *Agape Review*, *Clayjar Review*, *Pure in Heart Stories* and *Faith, Hope & Fiction*. He lives in Upstate South Carolina with his wife and three cats.

# The Friendless Week



by Erin Fanning

---



**O**n Kate's first day of school, Tara said, "I'll be your friend if you climb to the top of the jungle gym." All the other kids stood behind Tara. They watched Kate or looked at the ground.

The jungle gym soared above Kate. It pierced the sky. It touched the clouds. But Kate wanted a friend. She hated being the new girl.

So she climbed and climbed until she reached the top of the jungle gym. "I did it," Kate called down to Tara. "Are we friends?"

Tara fiddled with her braid. "Maybe." She walked away. The other kids trailed behind her.

Kate barely heard her. She was admiring a dragon-cloud prancing across the sky.

On Kate's second day of school, Tara said, "I'll be your friend if you touch a worm." Some of the boys and girls laughed. Others shuddered.

Kate wasn't afraid. She knew all about worms from fishing with Grandma. She dug in the moist grass. A pink worm slithered out of the hole. She held it up high.

"Too gross," Tara said. She and the other kids ran across the field.

Kate frowned. The worm squirmed in her fingers. It reminded her of the fish she caught with Grandma. She forgot about Tara and smiled. Grandma would always be her friend.

On Kate's third day of school, Tara said, "I'll be your friend if you walk on your hands from the slide to the swings."

It looked like a million miles to Kate. She could barely do a handstand. Still, she wanted a friend and Tara had them all.

She placed her hands on the ground and kicked her legs into the air. She tumbled onto her side.

Tara shook her head. The other kids laughed. Kate sniffed back a tear. She turned around and practiced handstands.

On Kate's fourth day of school, Tara said, "I'll be your friend if you eat a grasshopper."

"Eeeew," a girl said. The rest of the kids clapped.

Grasshoppers leaped in the grass. Kate scooped one up and cupped her hands around it. It bounced against her fingers.

"Eat it, eat it," Tara chanted.

Kate watched the grasshopper, so little and harmless. She squatted in the grass and opened her hands. The grasshopper jumped away.

Tara shrugged. The bell rang and everyone ran to the school building. Kate shuffled after them. She'd never have a friend.

A grasshopper sprang out of the grass. Kate wondered how it could leap so high. What kind of friend would ask her to eat one? She hopped all the way to her classroom.

On Kate's fifth day of school, Tara said, "I'll be your friend if—."

Kate shook her head. "No."

Maybe being alone wasn't so bad. There were clouds to read, fishing trips to plan, and worms and grasshoppers to study.

She climbed the jungle gym. From the top, the sky looked like a lake. She saw Grandma in the clouds with her fishing pole.

Two girls joined Kate. Tara stared up at them. The rest of the kids kicked a soccer ball.

One girl asked Kate what the worm felt like. The other said she'd teach Kate how to walk on her hands.

"Come on up," Kate called down to Tara, who looked so tiny all by herself. "We'll be your friends."

### *About the Author*

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When not reading or writing, **Erin Fanning** can be found skiing, biking, hiking or kayaking in Idaho's mountains or Michigan's northern woods.

## Three Photographs by Katharine Weinmann

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### Purple Peek-a-boo



## Quintessential



## Those Cherry Blossoms



### About the Photographer

Whether walking familiar neighborhood streets, in Edmonton's river valley, or faraway locales, **Katharine** brings a heart receptive to beauty's subtle shimmer and an eye for fine composition. An internationally published photographer, her images can be found on the pages of literary anthologies, journals and magazines, calendars, and have twice graced the cover of the *Edmonton Stroll of Poets* annual anthology.

# The Bushfire Rescue



by Emely Weiler, age 11

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A deafening boom filled the night, and a blazing light appeared. An immense wave of heat washed through the forest. Roo, a little kangaroo was cowering inside his mother's pouch, shaking fearfully.

"Don't you worry, Roo," she soothed, "We're going to be fine."

There was no rain, just bolts of lightning slashed through the air. Due to one low strike of lightning, one of the tall eucalyptus trees had been struck and it was burning fiercely. Screeches of distressed birds echoed, as the burning tree collapsed, right onto the other trees. In less than a minute, half of Makepeace Island in Tewanin was engulfed in orange light.

Out of the smoke, Roo saw a dirty grey bundle crawling towards them.

“Mum,” Roo cried, “Look! There’s a koala crawling out of the flames! If we don’t save him, he’ll die! Please, Mum, take him into your pouch. We can both fit inside it! Oh, please, Mama.”

“Of course, we will take him to safety,” Mama agreed, “No one is allowed to die!”

They bounded to the poor koala and Mama lifted him inside her pouch.

“Thank God that you saved me,” he rasped, “I would have died otherwise. Many animals are in danger. We have to save them from the burning fire!”

The koala was a bit big, so there was a squish inside the pouch but neither of them complained. They jumped to every living thing they saw and picked it up to save it, and by the end of five scary minutes, there were ten animals inside Kanga’s pouch. *Ouch!*

Out of the smoke, came a mob of kangaroos that stopped short when they saw the walking zoo. Half of them had pouches and joeys, and when they saw what a load of animals one poor kangaroo was carrying, they all helped to carry some of the animals.

All except one. “I will not carry filthy animals that will make my pouch stink!” she protested, “I won’t do it!”

“Oh, come on, Columba,” the other kangaroos urged. “It would help us to get somewhere faster! Help us!”

“If *I* carry any animals, I won’t be fast enough to escape if the fire reaches me. Then my joey and I will die. Too dangerous.”

“Don’t be a snob, Columba,” the kangaroos sighed. “Please?”

“Oh, fine,” the rude kangaroo huffed, “I’ll carry some. But only light and little ones so my poor tiny joey won’t get squashed.”

There were only little animals left for her to carry, so it was perfect. The joey inside the pouch was as snobbish as her mum and it started to complain about being stuffed inside her with other animals, even though she only had two snakes inside it. Like mother like child. Everyone ignored the pair and Kanga took the lead to bring all the animals to the beach as quick as possible.

The complaining from the rude joey continued until the mother kangaroo saw a tiny joey crawling out of the flaming trees. “Stop!” she ordered, “I have to save that poor little joey!”

The scared joey barely had enough strength to hold itself upright, it was just pulling itself along the ground, crying softly.

“Here,” the mother said quietly, “I’ll carry you to the beach.” She lifted the poorly joey into her pouch and quickly followed the other nervous animals.

“Mum!” the little snobbish kangaroo whined. “The new one smells!”

“You behave yourself, Mitzi,” the kangaroo glared, “otherwise you can walk to the beach!”

That shut him up, and he was silent.

\*\*\*

The trees around them were burning, so they had to move fast. The group rushed towards the beach, but the path they usually took was on fire! They couldn’t go that way! They stopped to catch some breath and then galloped towards the other part of

the island. Luckily this way was still clear from any fire, so they arrived at the beach in a short time.

There was only one building on the island (it was a hotel), but at the moment no one lived there except the owners, and they could escape the fire with their helicopter. The beach was filled with birds and other animals that ran away from the fire. Suddenly, Kanga, the mother of Roo, had an idea.

“What if the birds all work together to bring us to the land?” she exclaimed, “They could save all the animals that are here!”

“What a good idea!” the others chimed, “Let’s get off this island!”

They called all the birds to them at once to hold a big meeting.

“Hello, feathery friends!” Kanga cried, “Could you help all the animals to escape from Makepeace Island? We would love it if you would, so could you think about it right now, if possible?”

“Of course we will help!” the birds squawked, “Let’s make a plan.”

They huddled together and started to tweet to each other.

After a few minutes, they came up with a plan to carry everyone over to the shore on palm leaves.

Everybody helped to find palm leaves and after some time, a huge pile of leaves was lying on the sand.

“Attention, everybody,” the eagle screeched, “I want every animal that is able to swim to the shore to stand over here!”

One-third of the animals went over to him.

“Now,” he ordered, “Everyone who is less than a year old come over here, and make a line next to the ones that can swim.”

Half of the animals that couldn’t swim went over and formed a line next to the swimmers. Roo kissed his mum and left for the line of the babies.

“See you soon, darling,” she whispered. “See you in a while!”

Roo bounded over to the line and sat down, waiting for what was going to happen next.

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Two large paws lifted him up and popped him into a massive palm leaf. The animal patted him on the head and grabbed another baby and plopped it in beside Roo. It was Mitzi, the baby joey who had complained about having animals share his pouch for two minutes.

“What do you think is going to happen now?” Mitzi sounded so lost that Roo felt sorry for the little kangaroo, even though his complaining had annoyed everyone.

“Well,” Roo began, “I’m not really sure that I know.”

“Oh,” the joey pouted, “Are we going to survive this?”

“Of course we are!” Roo said briskly. “Unless you want to die?”

“No!” was the horrified reply.

While they had been talking, ten more animals had joined them in the palm. Twenty birds came over, and started to position themselves around the leaf, and then lifted it slowly into the air. With twelve animals on board, which weighed more than one

kilogram each, they felt like they weren't moving at all. Scared that they might get dropped, Roo and the other joey clung to the sides, watching the ground move in slow motion.

"Do you think we're going to make it?" the joey whispered, "I'm scared!"

"We'll be fine," Roo comforted him, "What's your name?"

"My name is Mitzi," the joey said.

Time passed, and they floated over the river inside the palm.

"Land!" Roo shouted when he saw trees ahead, "I see land!"

The whole party of babies laughed excitedly and peered over the edges to see it too.

*Splash!* A baby possum leaned over too far and fell into the blue water.

"Oh no!" Roo cried in dismay, "It's going to drown! Someone has to go and save it!"

Luckily, one bird saw the accident and squawked to the other birds to keep flying while he dove down and saved the poor possum that was looking like it was coming up for the last time. The birds kept flapping their wings and they made much more progress without the fat little possum. When the little animal was onboard the palm leaf again, all the babies sighed with deep relief.

"Can't possums swim?" Mitzi questioned the tired mammal, "My mummy said all possums can swim."

“Yes, adult possums can swim,” the brushtail possum explained, gasping for air, “but they don’t teach the babies to swim until they are two years old, because normally the babies are carried on their parents’ backs until we are one-and-a-half. It’s not normal to have to swim before that age. I have never experienced any kind of fire either. I don’t think I like it much. Can kangaroos swim when they are babies?”

“Kangaroos can swim, but only when they are in danger.” Roo replied, “My mum only had to swim once with me because we had to escape from a fox. She had to seal me inside the pouch so that I wouldn’t drown! It was awfully hot in there without the pouch open. But at least we got away from the fox.”

The sound of something scratching the bottom of the leaf made the newly made friends jump. The next second, a green vine slapped Mitzi right into his furry snout.

“Ouch!” he squeaked, “That hurt!”

“Can you lift us up a bit?” Roo requested to the birds. “I want to see if my mum is on her way.”

The birds flapped their wings hard, and the animals could see the other animals coming towards them, all on palm leaves. Kanga was floating towards him, together with three other kangaroos.

“Hi Mama!” Roo shouted, “Here we are!”

The birds were tired of their flight over the water, and the palm was sinking slowly towards the ground below them. When the group was a few feet over the grass, two birds accidentally lost their grip on the slippery leaf and the whole troop tumbled off and fell through the air, screaming. The landing wasn’t a very good one, but all of the animals had thick fur so no-one got hurt,

and when everyone was standing, they laughed about the interesting escape they had had.

One by one, the other animals arrived at the forest, and all the mothers came over to their babies and greeted them with a hug. Roo was also reunited with his mother, and he told her all about the adventure that they had had while flying over the river in a leaf. Then he showed her his new friends, and the mother of the possum invited them over for lunch, and thanked Roo again and again for helping to save her little baby.

*Toot, toot!*

A massive boat came chugging along the shore and stopped at the place where they were gathered. Out of the driver's cabin, came two men and they walked over to the animals.

"Hello there!" one greeted them, "We are here to bring you back to the island. Some of our men went there and now there is no fire anymore."

The animals could understand the humans well, but the humans couldn't understand the animals.

Roo wanted to hop to the man, but Kanga grabbed his tail and pulled him back.

"Mum!" Roo turned. "Why can't I go to that man? I'm sure he's nice."

"You can't be too careful with strangers, Roo," she said sternly. "Don't go running to people if you have just seen them and *think* that they are kind. Wait until he says something again."

The man had seen Kanga's bristled reaction, so he tried to comfort her and make her feel safe. "Hello you," he began softly, "I'm here to help."

As he had thought, Roo went forward, and this time Kanga didn't even try to stop him from going to the man. Chuckling softly, the man reached down and scratched Roo behind his left ear. Kanga tensed, but when she saw how Roo was loving it, she came over too.

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After their ride in the boat back to the island, the animals ran to their homes to check if their houses were still intact. Kanga and little Roo went to have a lovely lunch with the possum family, who were forever grateful.

# The Mystery of the No-Name Homework



by Paul Kaddis, age 12

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*Based on a true story*



**I**t all started one frosty afternoon in December. I was sitting on the smaller black sofa in the living room. I was looking over my Science homework for Co-op to make sure everything was finished before Tuesday. That's when the top right corner of the page had caught my eye. I forgot to write my name on the line provided. I took a pencil from my backpack that was leaning against the couch. Just as I was about to write my name, I dropped my pencil from the startle of noise banging against the roof.

My pencil didn't seem to make a noise when I dropped it for the noise coming from the roof was louder. As I ran to the front door, I dropped my homework causing it to slide under the couch. I joined my siblings outside as we all sort of peeked at the roof from the porch. We had discovered that the rain was turning into hail! I jolted to my room grabbing my boots, jacket, and gloves. I slipped my arms into the jacket and slid my feet into the boots. As I ran through the hallway, I slid my gloves snugly so that they were hugging my hands.

By the time I arrived back outside, the hail had already stopped. “No use for getting wet for nothing.” I thought. Returning back inside, I turned the corner and entered the dining room. My feet led me to the large window, and I stood there. I scanned the top of our van to see hail fading away from the rain.

And at that moment I remembered my homework. I picked up my pencil then got down on my stomach and carefully slid my hand under the couch looking for my homework. I felt a sock or two, plastic bricks, Ah, my homework! I pulled it out and went back on the couch. After writing my name, I turned the page. That’s when I saw it ... Not only was my name and the date erased, but all of the answers to the questions! Angrily, I grabbed my textbook from the white shelf next to me and restudied while writing all of the answers. Even though my mom is the science teacher, I still have to do my work. When I had finished, I told my mom what had happened. I suspected it was one of my two brothers playing another dirty joke. They both denied it.

All of a sudden it starts to hail again. I don’t want to miss the chance to try to make an ICE ball, so I run outside ignoring the fact that my brothers are properly lying. Bothering to get my jacket, I run outside on the porch and stick my hands out. They instantly fill with ice. My hands are freezing so I shove the ice into my mouth and run to the sink and turn on the hot water. Eight hours later it’s 8 o’clock and I’m tired. I lie in bed thinking about the homework, but I’m too tired to bother anyone else about it.

A few years later, I again lie in bed thinking about the no-name homework.

# Shem's Wife



by Emily Brown, age 16

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Elna stood on the deck, looking up at the sky.

Her husband, her husband's brothers, and her husband's parents were all inside, feeding the animals. Inside, where it was dry. Where the rain couldn't reach them.

After 40 days and nights, the rain was getting tiresome, but it reflected beautifully how she felt.

She shifted her gaze downwards, to the ocean that had risen over the earth. The ocean that had swallowed everyone she had ever known and loved. Her siblings. Her parents. Her closest friends. Everyone but the man she had wedded.

“Why, God?” she pleaded, talking to the God of her father-in-law. The one who had caused the rain, and told Noah to build the structure that was keeping them afloat. “Why did You do this? Why did they die? Was there truly no other way?”

She did not see her husband come up behind her.

“You’re asking the wrong questions,” he said softly, brushing his wife’s sodden hair out of her eyes.

She frowned at him. “For the first time since Adam and Eve were banished there is water falling from the sky, everything is cold and wet all the time, we’re on a giant boat with stinking, dirty, wild animals that constantly need to be taken care of, and everything and everyone we know is gone. Gone! How am I asking the wrong questions? Please, Shem. Just ... just tell me.”

He tried for a smile, but Elana could see the pain behind it. He’d lost people, too. They’d all lost people.

“Don’t ask ‘why did they die?’” he said. “They deserved to die. We all did, and the God of our ancestors is just. Ask ‘why were we spared?’”

Elana looked out over the endless waters. “Why were we spared?” she asked, quietly, barely audible through the rain. She wondered whether he might know the answer.

“Because the God who is holy and just is also faithful, and merciful,” Shem told her, the tone of his voice showing that he had struggled hard to reach that very conclusion. “Because when the first man fell, He promised him hope. The only thing that could get them through their fallen world. He promised them refuge. And He will always keep His promises.”

He looked her in the eyes. “Elana, my love,” he said. “He has not said that it will be easy. But He has promised us the same thing He promised our first forefather: hope. And someday, we will see what we do not see now. Someday, we will see His face once more, and our salvation.”

Gently, Shem kissed his wife on her cheek and tasted the salt of her tears among the raindrops. “I will be waiting inside when you are ready to come back, my love.”

Then he left her on the deck, and went back inside where it was dry.

For a moment, she stared at the water, the flood that had stolen everything she’d held dear, and was tempted to slip back into her despair.

But then she raised her eyes, and gasped aloud. It was as though God had heard them talking, and had known the doubt in her heart.

She ran, as fast as she could run on soaked floors, and called to the others. “Shem! Everyone, come look!”

And she knew that every word had been true.

Because for the first time in 40 days and 40 nights, there was no more water.

The rain had stopped.

# Held by the Messiah



by Catherine Valentine

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The morning sun was rising and already burning hot on the head of Abigail as she walked to the well to draw up water. The other girls and women were there laughing and speaking of the wedding that was to take place that evening. Abigail rather dreaded this joyous event; she was at the age where girls typically got betrothed, but no man has asked for her hand. She knew she was a hard worker and devoted to God, but no man could look past her deformed face.

Her mother had told her that when she was born the midwife screamed in shock at Abigail's face. She had been seen as less than desirable since that day. Therefore she hated weddings. They only served as a reminder that she was seen as less than the other girls. A diamond too rough to be prized.

As Abigail took her turn at the well, her friend, Sarah, came up behind her and gave her a hug. “Are you coming to the wedding tonight?” she asked excitedly. Sarah was a petite, excitable little creature and loved by everyone because she loved everyone.

“No, not if I can help it,” Abigail said with a shake of her head.

“Oh you must come! It’s going to be so beautiful and fun.”

Abigail gathered her jars, and with a small, crooked smile to her friend, she mumbled a “we’ll see” and took the path back into the village. Walking into her house she placed the water jugs on the floor. Sighing, she slid onto a low stool that was up against the wall. “Mother?”

“Yes?” she said without looking up from the bread she was kneading.

“Must I go to the wedding tonight?” Abigail looked down at her feet.

“Yes, everyone is going. It wouldn’t be proper for you to stay behind,” her mother answered, still not looking up.

A single tear slid down Abigail’s face. Another wedding to remind her what was always denied her because of her face.

Suddenly, a gentle hand cupped her chin, and she was forced to look into her mother’s eyes. “Why do you cry, child?”

Abigail took a deep breath. “I’m so ugly, Mother. No man wants an ugly wife.”

Her mother went to her knees and faced Abigail, still clutching Abigail’s chin. “Do you remember the story of when I brought you to the Messiah?”

“Yes, Mother. You have told me.” Abigail tried to look away, but her mother’s grip was firm.

“I think you need to hear it again. I brought you to the Messiah for Him to heal your face. He took you into His arms and kissed your forehead; His touch was so tender and there was true delight in His face. I asked him to make you beautiful and He looked at me gravely—I will never forget that—and He said, ‘But she is already beautiful.’ And He blessed you and gave you back to me. My heart changed that day and I knew you as beautiful. You need to let this story sit in your heart, Abigail. Know that you are blessed by the Messiah Himself and He saw you as beautiful. Who cares that these boys around here aren’t bright enough to know your worth?” Her mother smiled and Abigail smiled back. Abigail’s mother kissed her on the forehead and went back to making bread.

Abigail sat there for a little longer, though there were more chores to be done. She was kissed and blessed by the Messiah Himself; how many girls can say the same? As Abigail got up to continue her chores, she stood a little taller and brushed her tears away. The story was blooming in her heart at last.

That evening Abigail was determined to enjoy a wedding for the first time. She danced until her feet got tired and she laughed until her sides hurt. As the drinks were being passed around Abigail was found by her friend Sarah. “You’ve changed, my friend, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you have so much fun.”

Abigail gave her a big, crooked smile, “I have the blessing of the Messiah on me. How can I not have joy?”

Sarah embraced her friend, and they spent the rest of the evening together enjoying each other’s company and delighting in the

occasion. She was held by the Messiah and He had called her beautiful. Did other people's opinions really matter after all?

#### *About the Author*

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**Catherine** was homeschooled until college, and she graduated from Berea College in Kentucky with a degree in English. Her poetry has been published in a magazine and newspaper, and her short story "Margret" was included in *Seasons of the Four States* anthology. She has also self-published her own books.

Three Elements Watercolor Art  
by **Caden F. Weghorst, age 11**

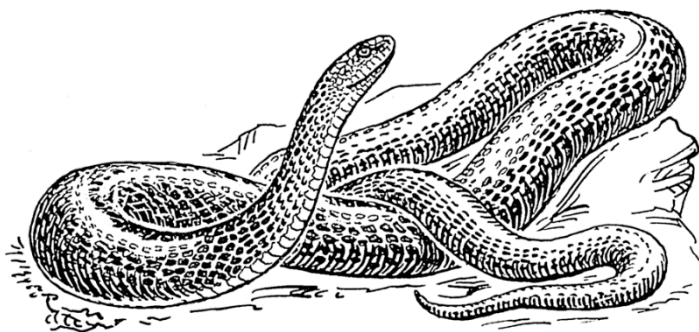
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## Beatrix and the Betrayer

by Holly Braendlein, age 16

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**B**eatrix had her gloved hands tied behind her back. She tried to squeeze her hands out of the thick rope, but the rope was tight, and it was chafing against her wrists, making her unable to use her ice powers. She was suspended in the air with a harness. Below her, in a wide pit, she heard the hissing of venomous snakes, waiting for their prey to drop down, mainly her. Beatrix's heart hurt. She had been put into this by a friend. He was much more than a friend, and he had betrayed her. She thought back to when she was getting ready to leave school ...

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Beatrix walked to her locker after the school bell rang. She enjoyed learning how to use her powers and abilities for good. Superheroes could do this easily on planet Fortis. She could not imagine turning into an enemy and using her powers to destroy life, although sometimes that happened among students.

Frederick came up beside her, opening his locker.

“Hey there, Ginger Locks. How ya doin’?” Frederick was more like a brother to Beatrix than a classmate. He always called her Ginger Locks because of her red hair.

“Good,” replied Beatrix. “Hey, have you seen Louis? He hasn’t been at school for three days now.”

“I dunno.” Replied Frederick. “He said he was busy, but with what, I have no idea.”

Beatrix walked toward her apartment on East Fonse Street. *Busy?* Beatrix pondered. *With what?* She wanted to believe that she was concerned for him as a friend, but in reality, she had had a crush on him since 5th grade. She had grown to like him. A lot.

Beatrix shook her head and reached into her pocket for the keys and unlocked the door to her apartment. The first thing she heard was her Enemy Alarm beeping. She rushed to her computer and clicked the location. It appeared to be in some sort of warehouse on Earth. She had hoped to rest a while from school, but villains had no respect for that sort of thing.

She grabbed her superhero apparel, which consisted of a blue leotard with equally blue gloves and boots. She then set her watch to the scene of the crime and instantly disappeared.

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Beatrix found herself in a dark, musty warehouse. It smelled of animal urine, but from what she could not tell. She wrinkled her nose. What devilish plans were being plotted here? She explored the area.

Suddenly, out of the darkness, a fist came at her and punched Beatrix squarely on the jaw, knocking her down. She lifted her hand to her lip and found blood. She looked around, but couldn’t see clearly through the dark.

She got up. "Alright!" Beatrix shouted into the darkness. "I know you are there! Show yourself!"

Her momentum was thrown off balance as something heavy and rubbery flew onto her back and proceeded to strangle her. She gripped at its arms, trying to wrench them off. She clutched on and froze them in place. She easily slipped the frozen mass over her head. It crashed to the floor. Ice splintered everywhere, to reveal a man. He had on a green suit. He had shaggy hair and appeared to be made of elastic, for he was extremely flexible. The man got up and shook the icicles off.

"That was a nice trick there, girly." said the man. "I've run into a lot of different powers, but that one is exceptional. Not one that will take long for me to beat, though." He smirked.

"Okay," said Beatrix. "Enough with the compliments. Who are you?"

"I am Fleximan, as if it wasn't obvious enough." He stretched his hand across the room and flicked her cheek. Beatrix grabbed his arm and froze it. "Try that again, will you?" She retorted. Before she could wholly encase him in ice, someone appeared behind her and tapped her on the shoulder. She glanced back to see who it was and was sent flying across the room with a sore nose. She groaned as she lay on the ground, feeling the room spinning. She sat up and thought she saw a flickering person before her. He seemed to be fading in and out of being, which was commonly called "phasing" back on planet Fortis. A person with this power could go through obstacles easily.

"Louis?" Beatrix gasped.

The room cleared, and standing before her was Louis. He had a dark look on his face. His eyes flickered, as if he recognized her for the first time. He offered her his hand. She rejected the offer and stood up.

She looked closely at him. "So this is what you're doing? Being a villain? Louis, what's going on?"

Before he could answer, Fleximan stepped in. “Ah, I wish we could let loose our dire secrets but unfortunately, that is not how this ordeal works. It’s not a surprise when you gab on and on about it, now is it?” He looked toward Louis.

“No, sir.” Answered Louis. He gazed down at his feet.

Fleximan stalked Beatrix until she bumped into the wall of the warehouse. “And we certainly don’t want to have our plans spoiled, now do we?” He shot his arm forth, pinning her throat to the wall. Louis phased over to her and grabbed her, wrapping her in a thick rope. He made sure her hands were well-tied as well.

Louis dragged Beatrix over to a big pit that was in the corner of the room. It stank, and she distinctly heard hissing. Fleximan took Beatrix and hung her from a harness, directly above the pit. She looked down and saw ... SNAKES.

Fleximan dusted his hands off. “Well, now that you are properly taken care of, we will be on our way. Come, Louis.” He walked away.

Louis looked at Beatrix. “Look, I didn’t think you would be here. I’m sorry.”

“Sorry enough to let me go?” Beatrix asked skeptically.

Louis lowered his gaze.

“Why?” Beatrix said. “What is so appealing about being a villain?”

Louis looked up and squared his shoulders. “Freedom, Beatrix. I am not told to do something I dislike doing. I get to have fun and be a man.”

“But, Louis ...”

“And a little creep like you is not going to stop me.”

And with that, he left Beatrix hanging there.

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*This is hopeless.* Thought Beatrix to herself. Her heart hurt. She had sincerely thought that he was the best boy out there. She had been blind and had gotten her heart broken in the process. But what was she to do? She still loved him, and yet he was on the wrong side. She knew the code when it came to defeating villains; put the lives of the people you are protecting first and foremost. She had to think of the civilians before her own crush.

The snakes down below her were getting restless. There was debris down in the pit, making it easier for the spitting creatures to reach her. She twisted away as one such snake tried to leap at Beatrix. Suddenly, her eyes rested on a desk not far away from her. A lightbulb swung overhead, casting an eerie glow on what seemed to be blueprints. There was a corkboard that had notes and drawings tacked on. From what she could make out of the drawings, they depicted a series of events surrounding a big school. She saw bottles of gas sizzling on the table, and underneath it were crates of explosives. Beatrix gasped. They were planning on sabotaging a local school! She had to get out of there!

Beatrix wriggled her hands free of the rope. The snakes were getting even more restless. One leaped at her leg, mouth wide open and fangs exposed. Beatrix quickly did a little twist in the air, and from behind her, shot forth ice, freezing the snake in a capsule of ice. She then took hold of the rope and hung on, making it crumble in frosty shards. She unhooked her harness and swung to safety.

Beatrix rushed to the desk. She had to figure out which school was in danger. A slip of paper slid onto the floor. It revealed the answer: Lions High School.

Beatrix dialed Frederick's number on her watch. "Hey, Fred! Look, I need some backup. Two villains are planning on destroying the Lions High School here in Manchester. From

what I can make out from their blueprints, they plan to release drowsiness gas into the school, and then blow it up. I need you to get everybody out of that building. I'll take care of the rest."

"Gotcha!" Fred said, before hanging up. Instantly, the wall dissolved, and Fred walked right through.

"Speedy," Beatrix said jokingly.

Fred opened the wall again, and they both stepped through into the Lion's High School.

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Students were everywhere, and they had no time to lose.

Fred rushed over to the fire alarm and pulled the handle. The school was a mass of confusion right then. Fred opened a portal in the wall and shouted, "Quick! Get out of the building! It's going to blow up!" All the students screamed and hurried into the portal, which took them to the high school lawn.

Suddenly, a hissing noise ensued, and gas started pouring in from the vents. Beatrix gasped. Fred covered his mouth and nose with his forearm and tried to hustle the teens out of the building, but it was too late. Students were already starting to droop.

"Quick!" Shouted Beatrix. "Open the floors!"

Fred nodded and opened a huge portal in the floor. Everybody dropped out of sight, safely on the lawn.

Beatrix swiftly covered all the vents with ice, stopping her from getting too drowsy. Then she had to find the bombs. She looked in each classroom, with no results. She looked in the lockers. Nope. Then she looked up where the security cameras were. Bingo! She shot a thick blanket of ice onto the bomb. *Hopefully that holds*, she thought.

She was on her way to the next one when she ran into someone and fell flat on her backside. She looked up and saw Louis phasing before her. He scowled fiercely at her.

“Louis!” cried Beatrix. “You are about to kill innocent teenagers, teens like yourself! Are you nuts?”

“No, Beatrix,” growled Louis. “They are nothing like me. And, yes, I am nuts, nuts enough to stop you from interfering in our plans!” With that, he lunged at her. Beatrix quickly rolled out of his way and froze him. He phased out of the icy mold and stalked toward her again. On his intercom, she heard Flexi say, “Ten seconds to get out of the building before it blows up. Hurry, boy!”

Ten seconds?!?! She had to get out of there. But what about Louis? She closed her eyes and shuddered. She didn’t like to do this, but she knew it was the right thing.

Beatrix whispered to Louis as he stopped in front of her. “I’m sorry.” Louis looked puzzled. Then Fred appeared and knocked him to the floor.

Two seconds left.

Fred opened the wall as Louis struggled to get up. Beatrix and Fred rushed through the portal just as the building exploded. By then, everything had gone black for Beatrix.

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Beatrix opened her eyes and blinked. She found herself lying by a bush. She sat up. It appeared to be outside the Superhero High School. She wasn’t on Earth anymore. She was back home. Fred walked over and offered her a hand.

“Are you okay?” He said, pulling her up.

“Yes,” she said, then, “No. My heart hurts.”

Fred pulled her into a hug, and let her cry into his shoulder. “You did the right thing, Ginger Locks.”

Before leaving for their apartments, they stood there in the afternoon breeze, praying, praying.

*About the Author*

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**Holly Braendlein** is a young girl who wants to use her writing for God’s glory. She is 16 and lives in Kent, WA.

# Return to Earth

## by Stephanie Mathews

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**I**t was one of those long days of summer, where even time seemed to be bogged down and slow-moving from the heat. The two kids, twins, were bored. They had played every game imaginable and had done all the things kids do on hot summer days, so they decided to just wander around.

An empty field spread out behind their neighborhood. This field was overgrown and nothing but grasshoppers could be seen bounding across the dirt and weeds. One of the kids, Lucy, took her binoculars and scanned the field.

“Something is reflecting off the sun,” she said as she handed the binoculars to Bryson.

“Probably garbage,” he said as he gave her back the binoculars. “I’m going to get a popsicle. It’s too hot to explore.”

“I’ll be right there. I want to see what it is. It doesn’t look like trash.”

“Suit yourself.”

Lucy bent down when she reached whatever was reflecting. It wasn't trash. It was a notebook of some sort. She opened it and saw that inside the notebook was a tablet. It was an old tablet; she could tell by its design. No one used these anymore, but she took it anyway and returned home.

Later that night, Lucy and Bryson were able to sync the tablet with their computer and turn it on. It was some sort of digital journal ...

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*Date: 04/08/3024*

*Entry Log: Allison L. Hines*

This will be my last log. I'm about to walk on the Earth. I'm going to be honest and tell you that when I first heard the decision that we would be returning to Earth, I was nervous and a little scared. You see, I've never been to Earth. I was born on a spaceship, and I always assumed I'd always be living on a spaceship.

There wasn't really a choice. I, along with some of the other crew members, were told we had to return to Earth. No suitable planet had been found, and if we didn't head back, we would all die.

“Won't we die on Earth?” Jackson asked. He was a few years older than me. He had been a baby when his parents boarded the ship. I was yet to be born, only a small soul living in my mother's womb. My only memories are of the spaceship.

Jackson's dad sighed. He always sighed when answering his son's questions because Jackson always had questions.

“Well, that is a possibility, but death is a guarantee if we don't.”

“All men are appointed to die,” I said. I thought I was only thinking it, but as it often happens when I’m thinking deeply, I tend to talk my thoughts out loud.

“Allison,” my mother said. “Not the time for philosophical statements.”

I only nodded, but I didn’t stop pondering. I heard the others talk, but I wasn’t really listening. It was too late; my mind had latched onto the subject of death and Earth.

I was unsettled about returning to Earth, but it wasn’t just the thought of death that made me apprehensive. There was more. Death isn’t a pleasant subject, but here on the ship, we hold to the teachings of the Ancient Book, followers of The Way of the Creator. That book speaks of an eternal life, another life—better—after we pass from this one.

Being followers and believers was the reason my parents and the others left in the first place.

My parents had explained that Earth had become a dangerous place, especially for followers of the Creator. I was still young so not too many details were told to me, but curiosity drove me to search the ship’s archives. There were old news articles that had been uploaded to the ship’s computers.

Believers of The Way were ostracized, mocked, ridiculed, imprisoned, and even killed. Something about the Creator and His Ancient Book was offensive to most people. They didn’t want to be told how to live, how to behave. They wanted to be first in all, and their desires could not be ignored. Anyone who thought different was labeled an enemy.

Some groups of followers, including mine and Jackson’s parents, came up with a plan and soon were on a ship leaving Earth. It was a risk because many had been trying to colonize other planets, but no one had been successful. They thought it was worth the risk and left with the hope of colonizing a planet where it would be safe to follow the Creator.

I suppose it was a noble effort, but the more I thought about it I realized that, even if they were successful, it didn't guarantee that people would behave. The Book is full of accounts where the Creator's people rebelled. The Creator has given us the gift of choice; born with a free will.

I kept my thoughts to myself. These thoughts were assaulting my mind. I became overwhelmed with anticipating life on Earth.

I've never felt grass on my feet, seen a bird fly, heard crickets chirp, smelled the rain, or saw a sunrise. Not only that, but what is it like going to the grocery store? Is driving a car hard? It looks dangerous to me! What is it like meeting new people? I've only known the people on the ship and all of them have known me my whole life! How do you talk to a complete stranger? Is it loud on Earth with all those people? Crowded? I could go on and on.

No one could answer any of those questions for me, so I turned to the Book and learned from the lives of the people who had lived before.

It took me a while to understand. The Book wasn't directly answering any of my questions and I started to question if any of it mattered. Why did any of this happen? Were we wrong to be out in space, to have left Earth?

Part of me let the fear infest me, and I began to blame those around me. I almost couldn't stand to look at my parents thinking that they, with their poor choices, had condemned me and everyone else on board to a life that would possibly amount to nothing. I haven't done anything but be on a spaceship. What was the point of it all? Would even going back to Earth matter?

One night, while I was reading the Book, a thought hit me. This thought didn't originate from my own thinking, it came from outside my mind, and it hit me like a punch, taking my breath away. It was like someone else had spoken into my ear like telling a secret.

The thought was that it didn't matter, not really. I was worrying about the wrong things, asking the wrong questions even. Circumstances changed, and what mattered was how one responded to those circumstances.

I continued to read, and my mind ripped opened as I realized that the Ancient Book may not answer a specific question, but it answered how we should be living the life we were given.

What was important was what I chose to believe and do with the time that is given to me. Whether living on Earth, a spaceship, or anywhere else. Life was more than just existing and my experiences; my knowledge of the Creator was important. My life could be a light to a dark world, letting another human see the reflection of the image of The Creator.

I thought back to some of the things I had experienced by living on a spaceship. It was incredible! Not many have the privilege of seeing the cosmos this close up.

As I type these words, I can see Earth for the first time and it is spectacular! I've been in space my whole life and have seen some astounding sights! So many stars and galaxies, but nothing is quite like Earth.

Every day, I've seen the vastness of space and live amongst the expanse of the firmament of the Creator, but looking at Earth I see love. I see a place that the Creator made special.

I don't know what I'll do once I'm on Earth, and I don't know how long I'll be on Earth, but I do know that I will cherish every breath, living life trying to remember that every day is a gift. I'll step onto the ground, thanking the Creator, for creation and the time I have living here.

\*\*\*

Lucy and Bryson sat silently when they had finished reading.

“You thinking what I’m thinking?” Bryson said breaking the silence.

“Oh yeah,” Lucy said, eyes wide. “We have to check this out! I thought it was an old fable. I never believed the old stories at all, but this changes things. We may be holding actual evidence!”

Lucy and Bryson spent the rest of their summer break at the library, walking old abandoned fields, visiting the few churches that remained, and asking questions.

Could the story of the space believers be true? And if it were true, then maybe the Ancient Book held the secret to life.

### *About the Author*

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**Stephanie Mathews** is a homeschool mom, works part-time as a librarian, avid reader, and writer. She enjoys walks with her dog, nature, gardening, and having adventures with her husband and daughter that include anything from movie night to stargazing and camping. Stephanie has two works of poetry published, an article and more in the works.

John Dallen



by Georgia Elliott, age 13

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It was July 1st. School had just ended a few weeks ago and the kids in the town were still getting used to it. Summer was a breeze for me. The prison doors had been opened; the inmates had flooded out. Oh, was I ready.

My friend Nate and I had been planning this for a long time, had been working on what we would draw for months, planning and replanning and replanning again. Finally, school was over, the supplies were bought, the sun dawned bright and happy, and the alarm buzzed.

Morning had come.

Quickly I pulled on my jeans and T-shirt. The weather was warming, and my sweatshirt was no longer needed. My parents had not risen, so I was able to sneak downstairs and out the door with relative quietness. There was one trip down the stairs, but it was quite a minor thing, and I didn't believe anyone had been roused.

Nate and I stepped out of our houses at the exact same time, just as we had planned. We lived right next door, you see. Nate caught up to me, backpack full of metal clinking noises, and wrapped an arm around my shoulder saying, “Ah! My partner in crime!” I laughed, but there was some feeling in my gut that didn’t want me to. The whole morning had seemed off. I just couldn’t tell why.

The shining sun had just crested the mountains, turning them red, as if they were wearing the light. We made our way down the sidewalk, watching it brighten up as the sun pushed himself higher. Neither of us said much. Even though I had been waiting for this day for so long, it suddenly seemed like such a stupid idea, and I wanted to turn back.

*No, some part of my brain whispered to me. Plenty of people have done this before. It’ll earn you status. And just think of what Nate would think if you backed out!*

“Come on, Dan!”

I was slacking, lost in my own thoughts, and Nate was far ahead of me. I jogged to catch up. We were passing through one of the rough parts of town, by the homeless shelter. I could see the silhouette of a man by a house. I didn’t want him to know I’d seen him, so I looked straight ahead. There was another guy, with a blanket on his back and wheeling an old rusty bike by his side. I never liked walking down this street. It only intensified the odd feeling, which still grew with every step I took.

Eventually we reached the tracks. I jumped with the cars that passed.

There was the whistle of a train in the distance.

Nate let his heavy backpack fall from his shoulders and unzipped it. I watched as the insides spilt onto the gravel.

The world was quieter on the tracks. The river, only yards away, gave it a nice, serene feel, and from back behind the trains the

sound of the highway was muted. There was the whistle of a train in the distance. Still the sun had not fully risen.

“Grab a bottle. Let’s get to work.”

I chose the dark blue and tentatively sprayed my name in the corner. Not my real name, of course, but an almost unreadable bubbled version of my nickname. After that, I grew more confident, getting bigger. Nate had jumped straight into the big stuff. “Don’t leave any inch clean!” He told me.

*See? This isn’t that bad.*

Well, it doesn’t feel good.

But I did it anyway.

Eventually, it was finished, the culmination of our efforts finally displayed on the car of a train. Nate’s demand had been fulfilled. Not an inch was left. On our one side, that was. The side facing the road was untouched, besides a few remnants of someone else’s crime.

The train whooted again, calling me back.

“We should get going.”

“Now?”

“I mean, yeah, we’re done.”

“Hey, you!”

Both our heads jerked up simultaneously. A cop! Of course there was a cop, why not?! And there was a man, hidden by a train car so we couldn’t see him, just now coming towards us. I had a good hunch he was the one who had called the police. “Run, Dan,” Nate told me, but neither of us moved. Nate’s bonds broke first, and he bolted for the trees, his will to escape

overpowering his shock. I was stuck there, my feet unwilling to unscrew themselves from the gravel, my eyes wide.

What would my parents say? What would my mom think?

*You could still get away now, you know, and if you make good time nobody has to know.*

That's true. They hadn't seen our faces close enough to be able to identify us. I could catch up with Nate. We could go home and pretend we'd been at Mela getting something to eat.

*Nobody has to know.*

That's when my feet were released. I turned and I ran, blind to my surroundings, wishing only to catch up with Nate and get home. I wanted to be in my room, I wanted to be safe, and I did *not* want to go to Juvie. The world rang as I ran.

Everything slowed and grew quiet for a moment, telling me something was wrong, as I took my last step before everything blurred. My ears rang and my head exploded, some ear-splitting noise breaking things apart, and all I could see was the sun shining down on me, gazing at me, gloating of his success, *'I made it up here!'* he told me. *'And you thought I never would!'*

The last thing that seemed odd was that my head was very warm, and I could not feel my body. It was the last thing because at that moment, the world went dark, and the sun said goodbye.

*.....beep.....beep.....beep....beep....*

*Ow.*

*That hurts.*

*What's that sound? It's giving me a headache.*

*Where am I again?*

I opened my eyes and at once shut them again. One thing was for certain, I was not at home in my room.

“Daniel?” The voice was fuzzy and distant, but it was a grip and a calling to reality that I held on to until I could blink in the light and eventually see, though it took a minute. I found my mom next to me, Holding my hand. My head felt stiff.

I was tired, and knowing my mom was there was enough, and I let myself fall back into the previous darkness that had so blissfully shielded me.

It was all revealed to me, over time.

The stranger, John Dallen, who had called the cops on us, had seen the train coming before I did. He had seen me running for the tracks, about to cross them, oblivious to all.

He had caught up, pushed me forward, and let the train hit himself.

John Dallen’s funeral was on Saturday.

I was going to go.

I had a minor head injury. “*The bark is worse than the bite,*” the Doctor had said. “*Head wounds always bleed a lot.*”

But what left me sitting in the hospital bed, staring at the ceiling with some sort of chasm in my heart, was why.

Sure, he had saved me, but why? He had just called the cops on me and Nate. And now he was gone to who knows where and I was left alive. The thought of utter darkness made me shudder. Was that what John Dallen was in now? Was that where I would have been?

There was a cop, waiting for me to be admitted out of the Hospital so I could be escorted to Detention. Yup. A month of it. Nate was already there.

The funeral came soon. All of a sudden, I was sitting in a pew in a small little church full of crying people, staring at a man talking about things like ‘Job’ and ‘Psalms’, each having little meaning to me, but for some reason they seemed to pile up, and a hollow space was being filled. There was that feeling, that pit in me I had had ever since that morning I had woken up and decided to ignore myself.

Man, was I stupid.

Then I was being hugged by women in black dresses and men in black coats, and I was meeting Dallen’s family, and I was invited over for dinner.

The days moved quick and slow at the same time. A month and a half had come and gone. I faced myself in a mirror -sweatshirt, baggy jeans- and set off for the Dallens’s house, a mere five blocks from our home.

It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The family all sat at one table. There was Mrs. Dallen and her children, and John Dallen’s brother’s wife and kids. There was laughter and talk and throwing of food resulting in stern words from Mr. Dallen, as he had introduced himself. Finally, when the kids were settled watching a movie, and a lull had fallen over our talk, I asked a tentative question, not sure if I was making a fool of myself or not.

“At the funeral ... what were the Psalms and like ... that stuff they were talking about?”

For just a second, there was a silence. But it was a thoughtful silence, broken by Mr. Dallen’s slow, sad smile and his answer.

“Have you ever heard of the Bible?”

Yes, I had. But I didn’t really know what it was. I explained that, and Mr. Dallen explained this to me.

“The Bible is a Holy scripture. It is the words of God, written by his people filled by his Holy Spirit. Psalms is a book in it, it is beautiful poetry.”

I was still a bit confused.

“Daniel, why don’t you come to Church with us tomorrow? We can pick you up, it’s hardly out of the way.”

I agreed, not quite sure what I was agreeing to, and we talked more about this. Eventually, it was time for me to head home, and Mr. Dallen, not wanting me to walk alone in the dark, walked with me the five blocks.

I asked him this as our feet hit the pavement in a homeward motion.

“Why ... why did your brother ... do what he did for me? I mean, I didn’t know him, and, well ... I wasn’t exactly being a saint ...”

He stopped me right there, the same sad smile he had worn before returning. “It is what the Bible calls us to do, Daniel. To lay oneself down for his neighbor.”

“But, we’re not neighbors.”

“No, your neighbor is everyone around you.” Mr. Dallen told him. They stopped before my house. “I look forward to talking with you further.”

The details were worked out for the next morning, and he watched as I climbed my steps and disappeared into my house.

That had been an interesting experience.

Church the next day was even more interesting. I think I was starting to understand it, the whole Bible thing. But God? My mind couldn’t wrap around that. Mr. Dallen just smiled and said, “I can’t either. Next Sunday, then?”

I agreed. Something about it seemed necessary. Something inside me longed for the funny colored benches, the words. The singing ...

I think I finally understand why John Dallen laid himself down for me. He valued my life more than he valued his own. He saw me as a sinner in need of a savior. And he knew I needed to be saved. He saw me as a neighbor in distress, unable to help myself. He saw me as a young soul with many more years ahead of me.

And he was willing to give himself up so I could live them.

As for me, right now I'm continuing with a "*next Sunday, then?*"

### *About the Author*

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**Georgia Elliott** has a knack for weird ideas, as some say, and her stories, books (currently in development), and poetry can attest to it. She spends her days writing and singing songs, reading, drawing, listening to a *lot* of music, and loving the world the Lord made. She lives in Malaga, WA with her family on their two-acre farm.

## Two Drawings

by Georgia Elliott, age 13

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Light



Son



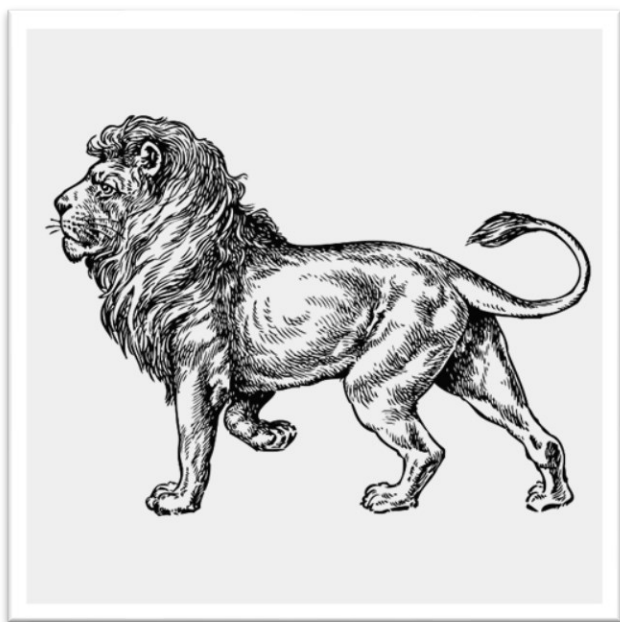
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Read about **Georgia Elliott** on page 121.

# The Fountain

By Adele Nickerson

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Looking at the steep mountain made me sigh. I still had a long way to go before I would find the fountain. My parents nearly had a heart attack when I told them I wanted to go searching for it. They didn't believe the traveling preacher's words, but they struck a chord within me. He said there was a great kingdom where we could all be free. None of my people had ever experienced freedom before. The preacher said that the kingdom was ruled by a man who would protect and love anyone who chose to pick up their burden and follow him. So that's what I did.

My burden currently rested against my shoulder. I adjusted it to lay across my back so I could better maneuver my way down the hill. The preacher's directions were vague, so I had only a

little to go off of. But he did say the gates to the kingdom were marked by a large, glorious fountain.

I marched into the forest and began making my way up the mountain. If I was going the right way I would find the fountain on the other side. I trudged slowly upward, my burden only growing heavier. The lush green trees gave me cover from the burning sun, but also made it hard to see very far forward. By the time the ground finally leveled out, I feared I wouldn't make it another step and fall backwards down the mountain.

I collapsed to the ground and rested for a long time watching the grass blow softly in the breeze. When I was rested enough, I hiked up my burden and continued walking. The breeze whistled through the trees creating a lilting melody that kept me company on my journey. But soon the trees began to grow sparse, and the sun began to set.

As the darkness crept in, I continued on trying to find a good place to spend the night. The farther I traveled, the more my fear grew. My back ached from the weight of my burden, and my breath quickened with the increased fear. Just as I was about to give up and fall to the ground, I saw a light ahead. I made a beeline for it, and as I got closer, I saw it was a man holding a lantern. He smiled softly at me, and I knew. I knew. This was the man the preacher spoke of. This was the man I had taken up my burden to follow.

I tried to run for him, but as I drew closer, he only drew farther away. I ignored the pain igniting my body as I ran after this man. I knew he was more important. The sky only grew darker, and the trees enveloped me again. Just when I thought I was almost caught up to the man, he disappeared. I gasped and felt the sudden urge to cry.

But before a tear could fall, I noticed the man had led me to a hollowed-out tree. The perfect place to spend the night. I let the feeling of relief relax my body as I settled in for the night. When I woke the sun was shining brightly and I felt more hopeful than I did when I started my journey. I yawned and took in my

surroundings. Just off the right I saw something sparkling in between the trees.

Intrigued, I began to make my way over to it. As I drew closer, the sparkling revealed itself to be a fresh spring that the sun was shining down on. I knelt beside it and drank the cool water gratefully. When I stood, the weight of my burden almost made me fall back down. It was considerably heavier than I remembered it being yesterday. I leaned against the tree to steady myself. I've gone too far to give up now.

Huffing, I slowly made my way up the rest of the mountain. When I reached the apex, I stared down toward the valley below and let out a triumphant *whoop*. The sun turned the sky gold on the horizon and gave me just enough hope to outweigh the fear and uncertainty I felt at the thought of trudging down the mountainside.

I barely took one step down before a rock shot out from under me, and I went tumbling downhill. I could feel every stick and stone as it scraped across my skin and could feel blood trickling down my arms and legs. I slammed against the trunk of a tree, which finally stopped my unwanted shortcut down the mountain. The breath had been forced out of my lungs, and for one horrible second, I feared I may never be able to breathe again.

Then, air swarmed my lungs, and I sat up with a gasp then a groan. My arms and legs stung, but thankfully nothing was broken. Shaking, I attempted to stand up and only succeeded in falling down. As I sat waiting for my strength to return, I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. I turned my head slowly, and came face to face with what was probably the biggest lion in existence.

I froze, unable to move or react, waiting to see what the lion would do. He sat observing me with a curious look on his face. He tilted his head, and his ears twitched slightly before he stood up and slowly ambled his way over to me. When he finally closed the distance between us, he looked around lazily then

turned his gaze back to me, almost like he was waiting for me to do something.

Cautiously, I began to stand up, and as I did the lion pressed against me and allowed me to lean on him. Surprised, I placed a hand on his back, and he began to lead the way through the trees and down the mountain. Our progress was slow, but I didn't mind. I was still stiff with pain and was grateful for my companion. As we traipsed through the trees, my pain eased to a dull throb. As my mind was taken off my pain, I realized I had no idea where we were going, and I was relying solely on the lion to lead me.

I decided I had trusted the lion this far, so why worry now? I continued to follow the lion and lean on him even when the sunset and the stars came out. I couldn't see the moon through the trees, but a few rays slipped through and lit my path. We walked a few hours more before the lion finally stopped. He laid down next to a tree and looked expectantly at me. I laid down next to him and settled in to sleep. Knowing the lion was beside me, I felt safe and comfortable enough to quickly fall asleep.

When I woke, the lion was gone. I sat up and looked around frantically, but he was nowhere in sight. Now that the sun was out, I could see the lion had led me to the bottom of the mountain. The valley stretched out in front of me, and hope surged through me.

I stood up and set off at a fast pace. I was almost there. I could feel it. As I walked on, the old pains from my fall returned and I was forced to slow down. I walked and walked until I feared I could walk no more. My stomach growled and I realized I had no food or water. Just as I was afraid I would collapse, I saw it.

The fountain loomed just ahead of me. The water poured freely out of the giant stone cross. He stood just beyond the fountain, smiling at me, waiting for me.

The burden laid heavily across my back, and I feared I couldn't go any farther. I was bloodied and bruised and felt utterly

broken. He would never let me into his kingdom looking like this.

He nodded at me and suddenly I knew what I had to do. I fell to my knees and bowed my head before drinking. Suddenly, He was beside me and lifted my burden onto his own back. The weight that had held me down didn't seem to faze Him.

My sorrows were replaced with joy, my wounds were healed, and I finally felt whole again. He flung his arms open wide. I fell into Him and He held me tight. I felt like crying, but nothing came out. He held me for a long while before taking my hand and walking me through the gates and into His kingdom.

#### *About the Author*

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**Adele Nickerson's** favorite things to do are read, write, and spend time with her large family. She has been writing practically her whole life and it's a big part of who she is. Adele's biggest dream is to make others happy and glorify God with her work.

# Jesus Clearing the Storm

**by John H. Kishler, age 13**

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## Game:

### Would You Rather...? —Bible Edition

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“Would You Rather?” is a fun scenario game played with at least two people. It’s not a game of winners and losers, but a game where one player reads and the other player chooses which situation or dilemma they would rather do. It’s a lot of fun and a great way to get to know your friends and family better, especially as they explain their choices. This is the Bible version, meaning you also have the opportunity to learn more about the Bible!

Many of these scenarios were taken from or inspired by [25 Christian Would You Rather Questions \(Bible Edition\)](https://www.churchleaders.com/25-christian-would-you-rather-questions-bible-edition/) on [ChurchLeaders.com](https://www.churchleaders.com/).

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#### **Would you rather ...**

Be in jail for 2 years

OR

Be in a whale’s belly for 3 days?

---

#### **Would you rather ...**

Have the super strength of Samson

OR

Have the wisdom of Solomon?

---

### **Would you rather ...**

Name all the animals with Adam

OR

Build the ark with Noah?

---

### **Would you rather ...**

Eat only locusts and wild honey

OR

Eat only vegetables?

---

### **Would you rather ...**

Walk on the water with Jesus

OR

Watch Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?

---

### **Would you rather ...**

Spend a whole day in total darkness

OR

Spend a whole day with frogs *everywhere* including your  
bed?

---

### **Would you rather ...**

Face the giant Goliath in a one-on-one fight

OR

Have to hide for years from your king who is trying to kill  
you?

---

### **Would you rather ...**

Hide spies in your house

OR

Hide a baby from Pharoah?

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**Would you rather ...**

See a host of angels in a field with the shepherds

OR

Meet one angel face-to-face?

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**Would you rather ...**

Be in the stable when Jesus is born

OR

Be at the tomb when Jesus is resurrected?

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**Would you rather ...**

Cross the Red Sea with Moses and the Israelites

OR

Be with Moses when he receives the 10 Commandments?

## Recipe:

### Homemade Ice Cream in a Bag

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Did you know that you can make your own ice cream at home? You can! And all it takes is 5 ingredients and about 15 minutes. Warning: your arms will get tired shaking and making this ice cream! But it's so much fun.

This "Ice Cream in a Bag" recipe was modified from the recipes on [The Best Ideas for Kids](#) website and [The Recipe Critic](#).

#### **Materials:**

- 3 Ziploc bags — 1 gallon size and 2 small sizes (**Note:** Name-brand bags are usually better than store-brand for this recipe. You want to get good quality bags, or they may leak.)
- A dish towel

#### **Ingredients:**

- 1 cup half-and-half
- 1 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- lots of ice
- 1/4 cup salt — Any kind of salt should work, including table salt.

#### **Steps:**

1. Pour the half-and-half, vanilla extract, and sugar into a small Ziploc bag.

2. Press out any excess air, and seal the bag firmly. Then place it inside the other small Ziploc bag.
3. Fill the large Ziploc bag halfway with ice. Add the salt to the ice.
4. Put the small double-bag into the large one, and cover it with more ice. Seal the large bag.
5. Wrap the bag in the dish towel (the salt makes the ice in the bag *very* cold) and shake your bag for at least 6 minutes. You may want to shake it longer — After 6 minutes, our ice cream was pretty soupy, but still delicious!
6. Take the small bag out of the large one, and rinse the outside of the small bag with cold water to get off all the salt. Make sure to rinse the top of the bag.
8. Open the bag with the ice cream inside, mix with a spoon, scoop out, and eat! (If it's too soupy, you can stick the bag in the freezer for a while to harden it up.)

**Extra Tips:** Try adding chocolate syrup to the small bag to make chocolate ice cream, or strawberry syrup to make strawberry ice cream. You can also try different flavor extracts, like maple and almond, to get different flavor ice creams.



## 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. 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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