

Issue #5

# Pure in Heart

A Literary Magazine for Families

May 2023



Pat Andersson

# Pure in Heart Stories

A Literary Magazine for Families

**Issue #5 | May 2023**

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**MIA MCDONALD, CO-EDITOR**

Pure in Heart Stories

Mobile, Alabama

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PURE IN HEART STORIES

Issue #5 | May 2023

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Cover Art: *Cross artwork* by Pat Anderson.

## HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

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

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

# Table of Contents

---

Letter from the Editors ...	9
-----------------------------	---

---

## Poems

---

<b>In All Things, Give Thanks ...</b> by Angel Tate	 11
<b>Favorite Color ...</b> by Pat Severin	 12
<b>Sunkissed Hummingbirds ...</b> by Elizabeth Wrobel	 14
<b>Grandma's Bird Bath ...</b> by Jason Kirk Bartley	 15
<b>Looking Outside ...</b> by Elizabeth Wrobel	 17
<b>Tag-a-Long ...</b> by Pat Severin	 18
<b>Holding My Heart ...</b> by Mike Hall	 19
<b>Teddy Bear Night ...</b> by Elizabeth Wrobel	 21
<b>This Takes the Cake! ...</b> by Pat Sever	 22
<b>The Bad Dream ...</b> by Pat Severin	 23

<b>My First Christmas in Heaven ...</b> by Gary Iaboni	 25
<b>Lion ...</b> by Robert Funderburk	 26
<b>The Lighthouse ...</b> by Marvin Lee	 27
<b>Things Fall in Spring! ...</b> by Ann Privateer	 29
<b>Green, Green Grass ...</b> by Sandra Arnone	 30
<b>Questions for a Saint ...</b> by E. Prout	 31
<b>The Bigger Picture ...</b> by Erika B. Girard	 32
<b>Prisoner No More ...</b> by Jason Kirk Bartley	 34
<b>Waking From a Nightmare ...</b> by E. Prout	 35
<b>Success ...</b> by Pat Anderson	 37
<b>Frequently Floundering ...</b> by D.A. Cairns	 38
<b>The Naked Heart ...</b> by Sandra Arnone	 39
<b>Courage ...</b> by Godsfavour Mkpouto (age 15)	40

---

## Comic

---

<b>Adam and Eve Comic ...</b>	<b>41</b>
by Pat Anderson	

---

## Stories

---

<b>Interview with a Rock ...</b>	 <b>42</b>
by Pat Anderson	
<b>The Price Tags ...</b>	 <b>45</b>
by Lorena Keck	
<b>Sebastian's Bastion ...</b>	 <b>49</b>
by Isaac Bouchard	
<b>The Butt Curse ...</b>	 <b>57</b>
by Rachel Michelle Collier	
<b>Sheep and Mountain Goat ...</b>	 <b>66</b>
by Laryea Nii Laryea	
<b>The Nesting Dolls ...</b>	 <b>72</b>
by Arvilla Fee	
<b>Spring Dream ...</b>	 <b>75</b>
by Lauren N. Simmons	
<b>Hard Scrabble Singings ...</b>	 <b>79</b>
by Luisa Kay Reyes	

---

## Recipe

---

Easy Cheesy Grean Bean Casserole ...	94
--------------------------------------	----

---

## Art

---

<b>Forest Friends ...</b> by Angel Tate	96
<b>Laughing with Friends ...</b> by Nadja Bullis	97
<b>I Run to You ...</b> by Angel Tate	98
<b>Jungle Animals ...</b> by Phyllis Green	99
<b>Warmth of Friendship ...</b> by Nadja Bullis	100
<b>Spring Cross ...</b> by Joshua Dease	101
<b>Hérons with the Cross ...</b> by Phyllis Green	103
<b>Cross Art ...</b> by Pat Anderson	104
<b>Prayers ...</b> by Carl Scharwath	105

---

## *Game*

---

STAR WARS or the Bible? ... 107

---

Who is God? ... 113

---

List of Illustrations and Photographs ... 117

# Letter from the Editors

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Well, it happened. We made our *fifth* issue of *Pure in Heart*!

This is exciting for a lot of reasons. One of the biggest reasons is that *Pure in Heart* is *growing*. We made it through five issues and five rounds of submissions, and the number of readers, submitters, and subscribers keeps increasing. Kids and families

(like you) all over the world are getting more and more interested in our little literary journal, and it makes us feel all tingly inside to know that God is using these collections of creative Christian concoctions (try saying that five times fast) to enter people's lives and hearts.

Another reason we're excited about Issue #5? Because we love poetry that makes us feel a whole spectrum of emotions. We love stories that make us think and imagine. We love cool artwork. We love the way Jesus uses creative work to speak to people. And this issue has all that, and a bag of chips.

Thank you to everyone who contributed---you are all so talented, and we are blessed that you entrusted us with your work. Thank you to those who submitted and subscribed.

And thank *you* for reading!

May God bless you and keep you,

*Veronica McDonald*

*& Mia McDonald*

Editors of *Pure in Heart Stories*



# In All Things, Give Thanks



by **Angel Tate**

---

I'm thankful for all my needs to be met  
And thankful for all the extras I get.

The surprises that sneak up out of the blue  
The love that I get, yup, that's a gift too.

Each day I'm renewed by His loving touch.  
The weight of His love is often too much.

So today we give thanks for our Lord on high.  
The depth of His worth, one cannot deny.



## About the Poet

---

**Angel Tate** is an author and illustrator of picture books, chapter books, and poetry, as well as a storyteller, based out of North Carolina. She studied literature in college, and now has found herself in love with writing, mostly for and about children and their emotions.

# Favorite Color



**by Pat Severin**

---

A little girl that I once knew  
would only wear the color blue.  
And whether she was dressed for play  
or off to church on Christmas Day...

her clothes were always shades of blue.  
A different color wouldn't do.  
I asked her why, she told me this:  
"All other colors I dismiss!

It might sound silly but for me...  
the color blue fills me with glee!  
In shades of blue, why, that's my thing.  
All blues can make me dance and sing!"

Right then and there, she sang a song—  
a ditty short, not very long—  
and as she sang, began to dance.  
She said, "Come on now! Take a chance."

So timidly, I tried my best  
to do a dance at her request.  
But it was hard for me to be  
like her, so happy and carefree.

She saw that I was bashful, shy,  
said, "Come on, give the dance a try."  
I closed my eyes and 'round I went,  
and as I did, knew what she meant.

To dance like that made me feel free!  
I understood what she called glee.  
Then something happened, don't know why,  
behind the eyelids of each eye:

I saw a color—I saw green,  
the deepest green I'd ever seen.  
That color made my spirit soar!  
I never felt like that before.

So now, when I am feeling low,  
I close my eyes and take it slow.  
I see that green, my favorite hue,  
and soon I know just what to do:

I sing a little song, and then  
I dance around just like my friend.  
And when I do, I smile, and then  
I sing a song and dance again!



### About the Poet

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

# Sunkissed Hummingbirds



by **Elizabeth Wrobel**

---

Hummingbirds kissed by sun rays,  
Kissed by God on the brightest of days.  
Sparkling and glistening all over town,  
Glittering and shimmering like the rarest gem around.  
Enjoying their visits in the summertime,  
Watching sunkissed hummingbirds,  
watching them shine.



## About the Poet

---

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

# Grandma's Bird Bath



**by Jason Kirk Bartley**

---

Grandma had a bird bath  
in the center of her lawn.  
Birds would begin to flock there  
at a little half past dawn.  
Sculpted to look like angels  
holding up this sacred pool,  
around this bath, in that part  
of the yard the birds did rule.  
She had bought the bath for  
her feathered friends  
from her caring heart.  
The birds appreciated it—  
not to disappoint her,  
started coming from the start.  
Different kinds of birds would  
come from miles around  
just to take a dip.  
There were robins, blue Jays,  
cardinals, sparrows  
that seemed to make this trip.  
Step in grandma's yard  
and a million birds would flee.  
They came and could be found  
singing in nature's symphony.  
They'd play with each other  
at their social place,  
then some birds would leave  
without a trace,  
only to come back again.  
Grandma delighted in each one  
and named them with a joyful grin.  
She'd invite everyone around town  
to watch the birdies disappear

into the water and splash around.  
Everyone would come  
and sit and stare  
at birds,  
birds everywhere.  
Some would chase  
the others away  
only to come back  
the very next day.  
This bird bath never went a minute  
without chirping, singing  
birds that were in it.  
“Birds of a feather flock together,”  
is what grandma used to say.

---

### Author's Note:

I wrote this poem in memory of Grandma, and her kind heart toward everything and everyone. She loved her birdbath.



### *About the Poet*

---

**Jason Kirk Bartley** is a Christian poet from Chillicothe, Ohio. He is married to his forever love, Nila. He is 47 years old and loves to write. He has a master's in Ministry from Ohio Christian University in Circleville, Ohio. He's won various awards and has been published many times.

# Looking Outside

by **Elizabeth Wrobel**

---



Looking outside and what do I see?  
A squirrel zipping up that old oak tree.  
Looking outside and what is there?  
A butterfly fluttering without a care.  
Looking outside and what is that?  
A white-tailed deer leaping through the yard in back.  
Looking outside and what is it I'm seeing?  
Animals welcoming the sweet days of spring.



# Tag-a-Long Song



by **Pat Severin**

---

A shopping mall, when you are small  
's like walking in a forest,  
but not of trees, of legs and knees...  
and shoes that play a chorus  
as one by one they hit the floor  
and click and stomp and clatter.  
It's LOUD, that's all that I can say,  
although it doesn't matter,  
'cause when you're built close to the ground  
the world's a noisy place,  
and little feet the size of mine  
have trouble keeping pace.  
But Mom insists I walk, not ride,  
that strollers are for babies,  
and girls of four (though it's a chore)  
should walk like grown-up ladies.  
I guess I'll tag-a-long and smile;  
I hope it's over soon!  
And if I'm good,  
do what I should,  
I might get a BALLOON!

# Holding My Heart



**by Mike Hall**

---

My granddaughter was all of 20 months old  
She was shy around her Papa if truth be told

Her Gigi could hold her anyplace, anytime  
Or when getting her ready for rest or bedtime

It had been a slow process for me to get close  
I could only hold her in a short dose

It was as if she was still measuring me  
Uncertain as to who, or what, Papa might be

As long as her mom or Gigi was close by  
She would talk to me and play, and never cry

But one day, I was all alone on a trail with her  
While her brother and dad rode bikes together

We sort of stared as the silence around us grew  
Neither of us knowing quite what to do

I held out my hand for her to take  
Hoping she would take hold, without an outbreak

She looked at my hand, and with hers took hold  
We started up the path, not knowing what would unfold

I tried to match my steps with her little stride  
Not trying to hurry her as I walked alongside

We stopped to drop rocks into a shallow creek  
I was full of pride at her dropping technique

We dropped pine needles, and watched them float  
Other leaves joined in the game—each a natural boat

The need to talk was not a primary aim  
We were doing okay, quietly playing our game

When her dad called out, “It’s time to go!”  
She started toward his voice, with me in tow

It was then that she reached up with her tiny hand  
Her silent request which made me feel grand

This moment for me is frozen in time  
Her little gesture will last me my lifetime

Holding hands on the path is an event set apart  
For when I took her hand...she really took my heart



### *About the Poet*

---

**Mike Hall** has been a teacher for 43 years, and began writing poetry in the early stages of the pandemic. His work is meant to encourage and uplift, bringing a smile to a reader's face or giving pause to think.

# Teddy Bear Night



**by Elizabeth Wrobel**

---

Sparkling teeth are extra white.  
Zipped up jammies are extra tight.  
Everything feels extra right  
On an extra special teddy bear night.

Forehead kisses are extra gentle.  
Bedtime stories are extra magical.  
Everything feels extra right  
On an extra special teddy bear night.

Soft pillows are extra fluffy.  
Warm blankets are extra comfy.  
Everything feels extra right  
On an extra special teddy bear night.

Lovely lullabies have an extra special melody.  
Bright moonbeams are extra special silvery.  
Everything feels extra right  
On an extra special teddy bear night.





# This Takes the Cake!

by Pat Severin

---

I think I'll run away today. It's more than I can take!  
 I *have* to eat my broccoli. I *wanted* chocolate cake.  
 I *have* to walk the dog, and then clean up my drawers and desk.  
 My mom says they're a sight to see, and my whole room's a mess!

I *have* to do just EVERYTHING, and it's not fair at all.  
 My mom does hardly ANYTHING. Why can't I play some ball?  
 But, NO. Mom says there's all this work to do, and I had better do it  
 because I did a few things wrong, she said, "Now, just hop to it!"

I did break Mother's pitcher, came in with muddy feet,  
 ran through her yellow tulips, and wouldn't eat my meat.  
 But all those things were...*accidents*! Things happen every day,  
 and I don't think it's fair at all! Why, I'll just run away!

I'll pack my comfy jeans and shoes, my T-shirt and my skates,  
 my baseball glove, my silver bat, and then I'll leave this place!  
 Now here I am at Clancy Street...should I go left, or right?  
 Ah...on second thought, I'll turn around, for soon it will be night.

I know my mom will cry a lot when she sees that I'm not there.  
 And I don't want to make her sad...I'm pretty sure she'd care.  
 Besides, I smell...Mmm, CHOCOLATE CAKE! Dad's grilling burgers, too.  
 I guess things really aren't that bad. I just was feeling blue.

My mom was right about those things, besides she loves me lots!  
 She helps me put my toys away and untie double-knots.  
 I'm glad I didn't run away because I guess it's true  
 that when you're in a family, you *all* have work to do.

So when the day seems really bad, and nothing's going right,  
 if you just pack your things and leave, soon daylight turns to night.  
 It's better if you wait right there, and think before you go.  
 They might be serving CHOCOLATE CAKE, but when?  
 You never know!

# The Bad Dream



**by Pat Severin**

---

Last night I had an awful dream  
and I know why I did.  
When Mom told me we have to move,  
I was a real sad kid.

I thought about that move all day,  
and when she said, "Goodnight,"  
the dream I had seemed really real.  
To move from here's not right!

So in my dream, like in real life,  
my mom said we must move.  
I got so mad and so upset,  
I yelled, "I don't approve!"

"You say that we are going to move?  
But I don't want to do it!  
I like my house, my room, my stuff,  
and that's all there is to it!"

"Then you can move, 'cause I don't care!  
I'm staying here, not going!"  
They'll miss me, and they'll wish they stayed...  
and when the grass needs mowing...

my dad will have to come and mow.  
He'll have to mow both grasses.  
I know my mom will be upset  
when she can't find her glasses.

She'll have to look for them herself,  
in not one house, but two.  
And since I'm mad, I will not say,  
"They're on your head...*told you.*"

And then they'll see that moving stinks.  
 They'll see that it's a hassle.  
 Besides my dad has always said,  
 "A man's home is his castle."

He didn't mean some other house.  
 I know that he meant this one...  
       but then God whispered in my ear,  
*"Be kind to them, my son."*

*"You'd be the saddest kid in town  
 without your mom and dad."  
 You wouldn't have them here to share  
 the kind of day you've had."*

You mean when I get off the bus,  
 the stuff about my day?  
 I'll have to keep it to myself?  
       ...Things sure would stink that way!

*"They both would live in your new house  
 and you'd live here alone.  
 If you would want to talk to them,  
 you'd have to use the phone!"*

There'll be no one ask for help  
 when science has me stumped,  
 or no one who would run back home  
 if I forgot my lunch.

*Now, wait a minute...*  
 There'll be no one to make my lunch  
 and every other meal.  
 I guess if I was by myself  
 without them, it would feel...

so empty in my house alone.  
 I love them both a lot,  
 and no place is a home without  
 the mom and dad I've got.

# My First Christmas in Heaven



by **Gary Iaboni**

---

I see the countless Christmas trees around the world below:  
with tiny lights like Heaven's stars, reflecting on the snow.  
The sight is so spectacular, please wipe away your tears,  
for I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs that people hold so dear,  
but the sounds of music can't compare to the choirs we have here.  
I have no words to tell you the joy their voices bring,  
for it is beyond description, to hear the angels sing.

I know how much you miss me and the pain inside your heart,  
but I am not so far away; we're really not apart.  
So be happy for me, loved ones, you know I hold you dear.  
Be glad I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

I sent you each a special gift from Heaven up above:  
I sent you each a memory of my undying love.  
After all, love is a gift more precious than pure gold,  
it was always most important in the stories Jesus told.

Please love and keep each other, as my Father said to do,  
for I can't count the blessings or love He has for you.  
So have a Merry Christmas, and wipe away that tear,  
remember I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

## *About the Poet*

---

**Gary Iaboni** values living every day to the fullest because nobody will ever know what tomorrow may bring. He was raised in a loving and supportive Italian migrant family who taught him that respect for all others is very important.

# Lion



**by Robert Funderburk**

---

Rejoice, rejoice, 'til all the world is singing  
 Rejoice, rejoice, 'til all the bells are ringing  
 Rejoice, rejoice, your hope comes from Zion  
 Rejoice, rejoice, as sure as life from Gihon!

Go down to the church  
 Jesus heals your hurts  
 On your knees to pray  
 Your troubles fade away

So rejoice, rejoice, 'til all the world is singing  
 Rejoice, rejoice, 'til all the bells are ringing  
 Be glad, be glad, your hope comes from Zion  
 Be glad, be glad, as sure as life from Gihon!

Ol' Satan's on the prow!  
 Listen to him howl  
 Roaring like a lion  
 His end comes from Zion

So be glad, be glad, for all the world is singing  
 Be glad, be glad for all the bells are ringing  
 Exalt the Lord, your hope comes from Zion  
 Exalt the Lord, Judah has its Lion!

Judah has its Lion, Judah has its Lion

## *About the Poet*

---

**Robert Funderburk** was born by coal oil lamplight in a farmhouse near Liberty, MS; graduated from LSU (1965) and was a SSgt in the USAFR (1965-1971). He has had 17 novels, 70 poems, one chapbook, and four short stories published. Teaching 4- and 5-year-olds in Sunday School for the past 20 years has been a passion and a blessing for him. He lives with his wife, Barbara, on 50 acres of wilderness in Olive Branch, LA.

# The Lighthouse



**by Marvin Lee**

---

There's a lighthouse  
At the edge of the sea,  
Shining it's light  
Along the rocky shore.  
Some ships,  
Their captains  
Brave and true,  
Heed the light,  
Saving their hulls  
From the jagged rocks  
Below.  
Other ships,  
Their captains  
Filled with pride,  
Their hulls  
Bursting with gold,  
Ignore  
The light's warning,  
Scoffing  
At the keeper's signs.  
And so,  
They crash upon the shore,  
Their hulls scuttled on the rocks,  
Their crew  
Sinking,  
Drowning,  
Down into the bottomless deep.  
So heed the light,  
Listen for the signs,  
So you can pass the rocks  
And stay afloat.  
And always remember,  
Never forget,  
Jesus is the lighthouse.



### About the Poet

---

**Marvin Lee** is a member of The Dark Poet Society and slush reader for *Quill & Crow Publishing House*. He also reads utopian fiction for *Solarpunk Magazine*. He lives over 200 miles away from the nearest town, deep in the Amazon jungles of Venezuela with his wife and four kids.

# Things Fall in Spring!



**by Ann Privateer**

---

I drive to work  
dodge fallen shoes  
littering the slow lane.  
Stylish, spiked heels  
three toned wedgies  
broken, flattened  
run over; a fuzzy blue  
slipper recalls Cinderella's  
glass mule. I wonder, if it fell  
from the coach would  
Prince Charming have found her?  
Tomorrow, I'll keep an eye peeled  
for socks.



## About the Poet

**Ann Privateer** is a poet, artist, and photographer. She grew up in the Midwest and now resides in Northern California. Some of her photography has appeared in *Third Wednesday*, and poetry in *Voices 2022*, to name a few.

# Green, Green Grass



by Sandra Arnone

---

Grandma,  
Do you see us running in the green, green grass?  
My brother, so small, still lags behind.  
I take him by the hand, never letting go.  
The gentle breeze carries the fragrance of honeysuckle  
That tickles our nose,  
Pembroke barking and nipping at our heels.  
The yellow sun caresses us in warmth  
That cannot be described.  
We are happy in this place  
With those who have come before.  
We see you, Grandma, and are proud of your courage.  
Grandpa is simply amazed.  
You are not alone,  
Always loved.  
We'll greet you when you come home.



## About the Poet

---

**Sandra (Sandi) Arnone** is a retired elementary school teacher. She is an avid reader, wordsmith, and lover of canines, large and small. Brutus, her Pembroke Welsh Corgi “extraordinaire,” was her constant companion for nearly fourteen years. Sandi enjoys hiking, listening to music, and sharing her dinner table with her wonderful family and incredible friends. She lives in upstate New York on eighteen acres of heaven on earth.

# Questions for a Saint



**by E. Prout**

---

What do you see where you are?  
 Are you touching shooting stars?  
 Can you see me where you are?  
 And why do I think you'd want to?

Are you waiting for us there?  
 Or breathing in that holy air?  
 Or waiting for an answered prayer?  
 Does the time difference affect you?

Do you sleep? Have you the need?  
 Without a body, do you breathe?  
 Are you where you want to be?  
 Who is there next to you?

Will you think of me again?  
 Will I see you, hug you when  
 I'm in His presence with you and  
 My shame can't rub off on you?

Are you waiting for me there?  
 Are you running, gone all cares?  
 Are you before the mercy chair?  
 What's He saying to you?

## *About the Poet*

---

**E. Prout** is an education student from Northern Michigan who began publishing her own work five years ago. She writes poems and songs about various topics, especially her faith and personal struggles. Her short stories tend to reside in the real world, though her long stories lean more toward the fantastic.

# The Bigger Picture



**by Erika B. Girard**

---

When people call me beautiful,  
I hope they mean my heart.  
I compare myself to masterpieces  
But I don't see a work of art.

I just see an unfinished canvas  
With patched rips, unmended tears,  
A few paint spills, watermarks, too,  
And mistakes I've made over the years.

This life of mine is not perfect—  
And neither am I, let's face it—  
But with each sad thought, I look within  
My soul to find good to erase it.

I would rather model empathy  
Than model clothes or bathing suits,  
And I try to glorify God with my life,  
My smile, and my writing pursuits.

I should remember no one's perfect,  
And no one has all the answers.  
Artists are as vital as mathematicians  
And scientists as graceful as dancers.

Although a child's first fingerpainting  
Isn't the Mona Lisa or Starry Night,  
A doting parent will see it the same  
In a heartfelt, sentimental light.

So I guess I'm God's work-in-progress!  
Even though I can't see what He sees,  
I know the paintbrush is in His hand...  
And that's more than enough for me.



### *About the Poet*

---

**Erika B. Girard** is currently pursuing her M.A. in English and Creative Writing with a concentration in Poetry through SNHU. She derives creative inspiration from her family, friends, and faith. Her work appears in *Black Fox*, *Iris Literary Journal*, *Viewless Wings*, and more. She also proofreads for *Wild Roof Journal*.

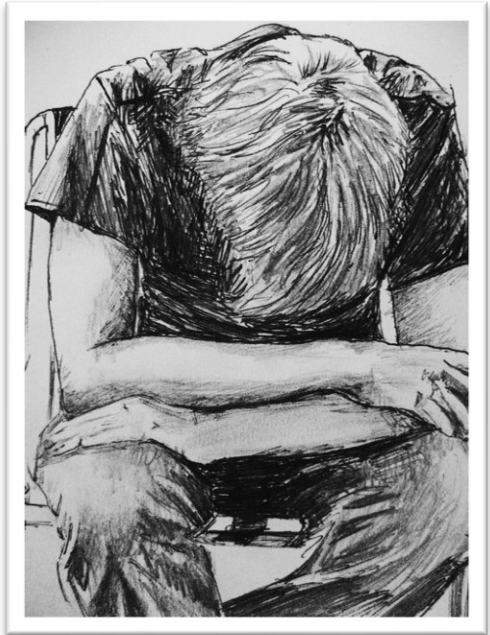
# Prisoner No More



**by Jason Kirk Bartley**

---

Lost and broken,  
a prisoner inside.  
Nowhere to run  
and nowhere to hide.  
Young and brutal were they all.  
Ready to watch me stumble,  
ready to make me fall.  
I can replay their laughter,  
the demons inside.  
Gnawing at my mind,  
they'd try and reside.  
Fear and contemplations  
of what could be,  
kept me in my prison  
where I could not be free.  
How I remember so clearly  
being their joke.  
The fun they used to make of me  
and the fun they used to poke.  
'Till one day God came and released me.  
no more to be,  
no more hurtful memories,  
no more visions to see.



# Waking From a Nightmare



**by E. Prout**

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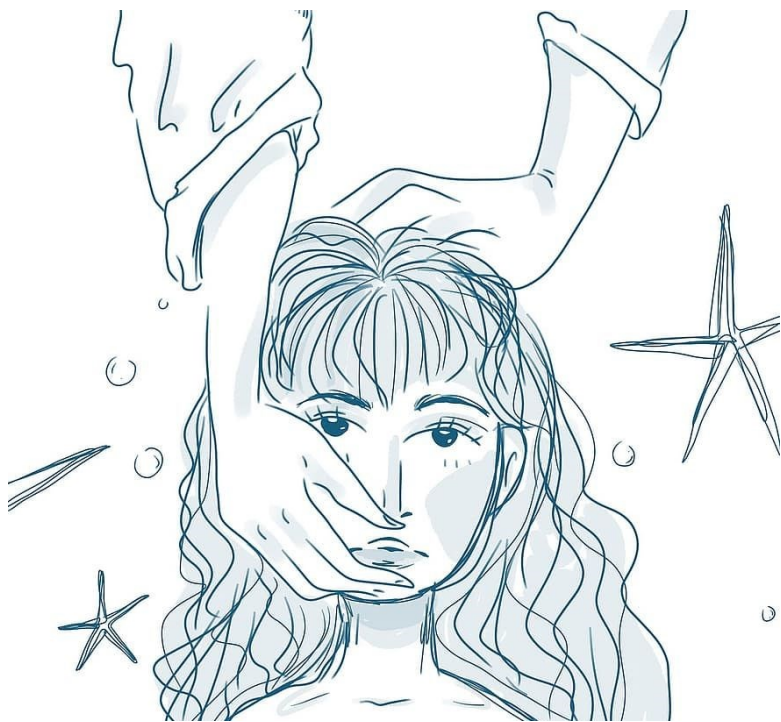
My heart is pounding in my chest  
All of me is drenched in sweat  
I don't know why—I didn't dream  
I don't remember anything  
I still can't breathe—my chest still burns  
And every muscle in me hurts  
Whatever happened, I can't say  
Last minute dark and now it's day  
I look around and see myself  
At home, the Gospel on a shelf  
Has it a meaning?—I don't know  
It's like the Savior turned to go  
I don't know how to call Him back  
It's just a feeling not a fact

I've learned to breathe again, I think  
But somehow I'm still scared to blink  
Of going back where I belong—  
I'll speak the truth inside a song  
I'll sing of home and going there  
I'll sing of home—there's no night there  
I'll sing of pastures green enough  
I'll speak of fiery tongues and love  
Of God's anointing pow'r in me  
Of all the things my eyes can't see  
Of who I am, and who You are  
Of rushing winds and falling stars  
I wish I could stop failing You,  
But this is all I know to do.

You found me when I didn't ask  
You found me—called me up to task  
You called me when I thought I loved You

You called me, and You led me to You  
I thought I knew about Your grace  
But still I asked if I was saved  
I never thought You'd change Your mind  
Or thought that *I'd* be left behind  
That's all I wondered when You found me  
When my fears were out to drown me  
Swimming in the storm I'd made—  
The storm I'm swimming in today  
I'd thought I'd beaten this all down  
But now You're leaving me to drown

You never have—You never will  
Why can't I ever just be still  
Why can't I hear You in the wind—  
“Because You aren't listening.  
If you were, my darlin' dear,  
You would know I will still be here.



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Read about **E. Prout** on page 31.

# Success



**by Pat Anderson**

---

Some folks define success by monetary gain,  
But I define it as Jesus slain  
And risen again to make me free.  
Success is mine; Christ lives in me.

If I can look back in 30 years  
And see that my character, knowing no fear,  
Had modeled love, wisdom, and honesty,  
Success was mine; Christ lived in me.

If I met my goals by working hard,  
Treated people fairly and kept my word,  
And earned their respect rather simply,  
Success was mine; Christ lived in me.

Let others define success by monetary gain.  
I'll choose a path that might seem plain.  
Contentment and wealth coexist, you see.  
Success is mine; Christ lives in me.

---

## *About the Poet*

**Pat Anderson** is a piano teacher/tennis enthusiast who enjoys writing poetry, young children's books, drawing cartoons, and writing music. Four of her young children's books, mostly about tennis or music, are available on Amazon. Piano music is available on Sheet Music Plus.

# Frequently Floundering



by **D.A. Cairns**

---

I'm frequently floundering, forever fearing failure,  
far flung, flippant and fancy-free,  
forcefully finicky and inflexible,  
fitfully frantic and fantastically foolish—  
fit for the fiery furnace.

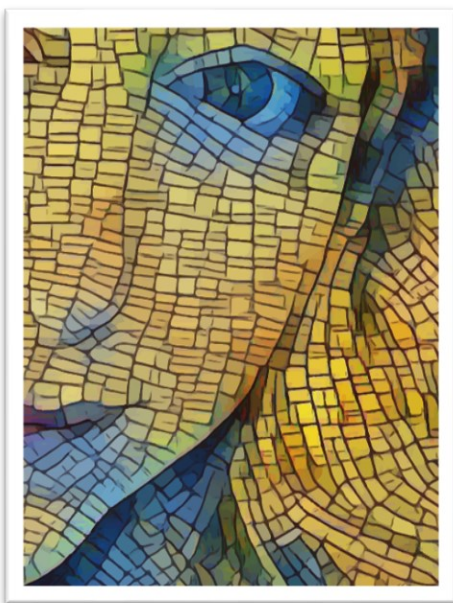
I am human.

Friendly, fulsome, and fervent.

Finite and fragile, but full of fearless faith,  
fighting feeble fiends with feisty fists of fury,  
fully furnished and fortified.

Firmly fastened, I'm fully forgiven

I am saved.



## About the Poet

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Heavy metal lover and cricket tragic, **D.A. Cairns** lives on the south coast of New South Wales. He works as a freelance writer, has had over 100 short stories published, and has authored seven novels, and a superficial and unscientific memoir, *I Used to be an Animal Lover*. You may like to visit his website <http://dacairns.com.au>

# The Naked Heart



**by Sandra Arnone**

---

Where do you keep your naked heart?  
The heart that is too often  
Silenced by the noise of this world.  
The heart that loves  
And surrenders for another  
Its own needs and desires.  
For here is where God dwells.  
He knew you before  
you were in your mother's womb  
and smiles upon those  
who can still find such a heart  
within themselves in the end.



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Read about **Sandra Arnone** on page 30.

## Courage

**by Godsfavour Mkpouto, age 15**

---



I am a special child  
 Created by God almighty  
 Beautifully and wonderfully made  
 In the image of God

Excellence is my watch word  
 I will get to the peak of my career  
 All by God's sufficient grace  
 This I will achieve

By studying hard  
 By burning the midnight oil  
 By believing in the courage  
 That God has embedded in me

Courage to achieve the impossible  
 Courage to be strong willed  
 Courage to set my target  
 Courage to be who God wants me to be

# Adam and Eve Comic

by Pat Anderson

---



"AT LEAST ONE GOOD THING CAME FROM LEAVING THE GARDEN -  
MY SNAKESKIN PURSE AND SHOES TURNED OUT QUITE NICELY,  
DON'T YOU THINK?"

# Interview With a Rock



by Pat Anderson

---



**Y**ou want to interview me? Sure, what do you want to know?

*You were the Rock Guard to the tomb where Jesus was buried, were you not?*

Yes, I'm the one.

*Can you tell me what you saw? Afterall, you were the only one to see the entire burial and resurrection.*

Yes, it began on a Friday. My Lord had just died on a cross. I only know because it became dark midday as if even the sun mourned the passing of its maker. There was a great earthquake, and the rocks cried

out. I must've cried the loudest to have been chosen as a guard for my Lord's body.

Later that day, Joseph, the man who owned the tomb, came with Jesus' body all wrapped in clean linen, and laid Him in his new tomb. You see, Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb because He wasn't going to need it very long. Joseph rolled me across the entrance so no one could enter. Roman soldiers made sure I covered every inch of the opening to the tomb. They stood watch day and night because they had heard Jesus say He would rise again after three days, and they felt threatened by that idea.

*So, the guards never left their watch or slept?*

Oh, no. They knew their lives depended on doing a good job. They took turns sleeping.

*What happened next?*

On the third day, at the break of dawn, I watched as the room lit up in a glorious and peaceful light. Jesus sat up and broke out of the linen wraps. He stood up, and taking the handkerchief that had covered His head, He folded it and laid it in a different spot. That's my Savior, always doing things in an orderly way. Some think He was sending the message that He was coming back one day.

*What were you feeling as you watched this miracle?*

I was quivering with joy! He turned and smiled at me, pure love shining through His eyes. We embraced, and suddenly He was gone. I think He walked right through me. I felt complete.

*Where did He go?*

He may have walked in the garden. Right afterwards I heard the voices of Mary and Mary Magdalene. Suddenly, there was another earthquake. All of us rocks sang for joy. An angel came from heaven, rolled me away from the door, and sat on me! Many rocks have weary travelers rest on them, but I felt extra blessed to have an angel of God resting on me. I was ecstatic! The two Marys were shielding their eyes and trembling in awe, but those Roman soldiers were so petrified they

looked like dead men. It really finished them off when the angel spoke! They reminded me of my friend the armadillo who rolls into a ball when he's scared.

*What did the angel say?*

The angel told the two women that he knew they were looking for Jesus, but He was not there. He told them that Jesus had risen just as He said He would. He then invited them into the tomb to see where Jesus had lain. Mary and Mary Magdalene were crying tears of joy. They gasped when they saw the empty linen wrap and the folded linen handkerchief. This was a clear sign that Jesus had really risen from the dead. He *had* beaten death! If someone had stolen his body, they wouldn't have left the burial wraps in the tomb. They certainly wouldn't have taken the time to fold one cloth and set it aside.

*Did Jesus appear to them in the tomb?*

Not just yet. The women ran from the tomb to go tell the other disciples the good news. While on the way Jesus appeared to them. At first, they thought He was the gardener, but then they recognized His voice. He told them to come to Galilee, and to tell their friends to come, too.

*What happened to the Roman guards? Did they run away?*

Yes, those spineless guards ran straight to the chief priests to tell them what happened. The chief priests paid them to spread a lie that Jesus' disciples stole him during the night. In exchange they would spare their lives. The power-hungry Romans didn't like the idea of a more powerful Jesus. While some believed the lie, mostly Christianity spread all over the world. I feel blessed to have witnessed the most important event in history!

*Yes, you certainly did! Thank you for sharing your eye-witness account of the burial and resurrection of our Lord!*

You're welcome.

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Read about **Pat Anderson** on page 38.

# The Price Tags



by Lorena Keck

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Jeff and Ivan, two sixth graders, tried on baseball mitts at King's Superstore. They had been mowing their neighbor's lawns to earn money for a mitt that they could share. As they tried them on, one by one, they'd pound their right fist into the mitt pocket to make sure it felt just right.

"Yeah. This is the best. I'd really catch a fly ball with this one." Ivan's eyes gleamed as he pounded his fist into the mitt one more time.

"But look at this one, Jeff. It's only \$14.98."

"I like this one better."

"But Ivan, we don't have \$24.98."

Without moving his head, Ivan rolled his eyes around to make sure no one was watching, then he carefully switched the price tags. “I do this all the time,” he whispered, as he strode nonchalantly to the cash register and paid \$14.98 for the \$24.98 mitt.

\*\*\*

The boys jumped on their bikes and headed to their homes like a policeman was chasing them. Jeff’s heart raced faster than his legs peddled. He threw his bike onto the front lawn, and ran into the house and down the hall to his room.

He threw himself across his bed and almost cried. *What would mom and dad think of me? What does Jesus think of me?*

“Jesus, please forgive me,” Jeff prayed.

After dinner, Jeff phoned Ivan. “I won’t be at the championship game, but I hope we win.”

“Why won’t you be at the game? I can’t play without my best friend rooting for me.”

“I’m going back to the Henderson’s to mow their lawn.”

“Why? We already bought the mitt.”

“I want to pay the store what we cheated them.”

Ivan whispered into the phone, “Why? That’s pretty stupid! They don’t even know.”

“Well, Jesus knows, and I care what He thinks. He wants us to be honest.”

\*\*\*

It took Jeff all afternoon to finish Henderson's lawn without Ivan's help. And Ivan had a hard time concentrating on the championship baseball game—even with his new mitt.

Jeff took the ten dollars Mrs. Henderson gave him and walked to Kings' Superstore.

"May I talk with the manager, please?" Jeff's heart thundered in his ears, and he wiped his sweaty hands on his jeans.

"Hello, son. I'm the manager. How can I help you?"

"Ah, well, it's hard to explain," Jeff stammered. "Yesterday my friend and I bought a baseball mitt. We didn't have enough money for the mitt we wanted, so we changed the price tags. I don't want my friend to get into trouble, but here's the rest of the money. I know Jesus didn't like what we did. This is the mitt that should be \$14.98."

The manager put his hand on Jeff's shoulder. "I want to thank you for being honest, young man. That took a lot of courage."

"I'm very sorry, Sir. Please forgive us."

\*\*\*

Ivan was waiting at Jeff's house when Jeff rode his bike up to the porch.

"Hey, what took you so long? We won the game by two points. I thought we were going to lose."

"I'm glad we won, and I sure hated to miss the game, but I had to pay that store what we owed on that mitt."

"What did they say? Were they mad? Were you scared? Did you tell them my name?"

“The manager was very thankful. They also changed the price back to \$14.98 to be fair to the person who buys that mitt. No, I didn’t tell him your name.”

“I’ve never met anyone like you, Jeff. What makes you so honest?”

“It’s because I honor Jesus. He helped me. If you want to learn more about Jesus, and how he can help you be honest, come to church with me Sunday.”

The two friends did a high five, and then ran into the kitchen in search of something to munch on.

#### *About the Writer*

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**Lorena Keck** has been writing for Jesus for the past thirty years. She is now in her eighties and has eight grandchildren and twenty great grandchildren. She lives in Texas with her retired-minister husband of sixty-two years and her daughter’s family.

# Sebastian's Bastion



by Isaac Bouchard

---



Isabelle threw her backpack on her bed the way she always had. The binder would slip from the broken zipper, the papers would fly out of it since she never closed the rings, and she knew in the back of her head that the next day she'd shove them all back in just the same. It felt a little different in the last year, however, without Sebastian to poke a little gentle fun at her. It's funny, the things you'd never think you'd miss. Her parents still left his side of the room in the tornado-visit style of a high school boy. She was glad they did.

The sun was shining through the window on his side of the room. It illuminated all the flecks of dust that always sprung up when she swung her door shut, tiny particles like memories floating all around her. Everything was covered in it except the

windowsill that always stayed open in the summer. Maybe it was from the wind and rain that always came through, but there was never much dust there, and even the army men scattered about it never seemed to collect any.

She never moved them either, but they were never quite in the same place she left them. She assumed the breeze was knocking them around, but she liked it that way. It made her feel like Sebastian was still around, setting up their formations in mock battles.

In spite of all the times she called him names, all the times they fought, all the times they threw food across the room at each other, she really did miss him. It was her biggest regret she would never get the chance to tell him that.

“Isabelle! Dinner!” It was her mother. She closed the door and shut the light, leaving with a lingering glance at Sebastian’s old space. It was quiet as she closed the door, but it wouldn’t be for long.

There was a battle about to begin over on that dusty side of the room.

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“Steady, men!”

“Hold the line!”

“It’s coming!”

The tiny men levelled their tiny guns, wishing they had some tiny ammunition in their tiny hands. Gradually, in a zigzag, the centipede scaled the wall, each of its legs the length of any one of the men. They held strong, their battlefield of the windowsill old, comfortable and familiar. They all knew it was about to cross into the room. It was their duty to prevent that from

happening. They'd stay and guard that windowsill with their lives if they had to.

Its giant mandibles glimmered in the moonlight. "Form ranks!" the sergeant yelled, and the men fell in line, plastic shoulder to plastic shoulder. Pointy little sticks, guns that could never fire, were each aimed at the centipede.

It came at them so quickly. It doesn't matter if you're six feet or six centimetres; it takes bravery to stand in the line of fire. Not one soldier took a single step backwards as it came at them. They had to work as a team, and each soldier took their courage from their brave sergeant standing right in line with them. They raised their weapons, not having an ability to shoot but using the weapons to force the centipede away.

It was over in a minute, but it felt like an hour. Once the centipede realised it wouldn't be so easy to cross over a line of sharp points, it decided there were easier hunting grounds elsewhere, and with its many legs it walked back out the window.

They each let out a heavy, relieving sigh. Some patted each other on the back, some just knelt down in exhaustion. However, just because it retreated didn't mean it was gone. The indomitable sergeant sent one more soldier off to the edge to ensure the monster was indeed gone this time. "Holloway – once more!" he called.

"On it, Sarge!" Private Holloway hopped down on the slight edge just beneath the outside of the window to get a better look, just out of sight.

And then, unexpectedly, distracted as they were by the fight with the centipede, the light came. Brilliant, all-encompassing, and total, it flooded every corner. The whole world, dark a moment before, was bright as midday.

Each soldier froze, some aiming their rifles, some crawling. This time, maybe they weren't quick enough. It all became so quiet. Isabelle, the child that was the owner of their whole world, looked in their direction and paused. One hand was still on the light switch, looking as if she saw something.

Breaking the silence, Holloway called from over the ledge. "Looks good to me, Sarge, think it's gone and run off!"

Isabelle yelped, fell back, and landed on her bed. For the first time in their years on the field, their cover was blown.

"Sarge?" the private called, looking over the edge and realising what she'd done. "Oh." She scrambled up the ridge and made a terrible attempt at a stationary pose, but it was far too little, far too late.

Isabelle slowly crept up from where she hid. She peered down on them with eyes as large as dinner plates. It's not that they were afraid of her; they were just worried about how she'd react. This was the one they meant to protect from harm, and even to scare her would feel like a failure in their sworn duty.

She didn't look particularly frightened, however. Instead, she just had the same expression of a kid looking at a dinosaur in an exhibit at a museum; awe and fascination, but not fear. In a voice both high-pitched and booming at the same time, she spoke to them. "Hello?" she whispered nervously. They'd heard her speak before, but on the phone to friends, calling to her parents, or sometimes speaking to herself as she wrote in her diary. Never had she said a word to them.

The soldiers stayed quiet. Not one moved, not one blinked.

"I saw you. I heard you, too," she whispered again. "It's okay." A few of the soldiers, without alerting the girl, twisted their heads ever so slightly to see their sergeant and follow his lead. "I know I heard you. I know I did!" she insisted. "Just... talk to me, okay?"

The sergeant knew what he had to do. She heard Private Holloway, and there was no sense denying it. He smacked his heels together, gave a sharp salute, and said with all the pride he could muster, "Sergeant Billy Warnock reporting, ma'am!"

Well, she jumped back again so fast she nearly threw herself through the wall. Each one of the soldiers relaxed from their poses now that their secret was out. Breathing heavily, the girl returned, pushing the messy strands of hair out of her face. "You can talk! How? Am I..." She pinched herself again. "Ow! Nope, not dreaming." After inspecting them again and seeing the sergeant still standing at attention, she managed to calm herself down. "I'm Isabelle," she said in awe.

"I suppose it would be right to explain why we can talk," Sergeant Warnock offered. She nodded her head so fast they worried she'd hurt her neck. "We're stationed here to ward off any and all potential threats. If I may say so myself, ma'am, our company has performed admirably for the past two years we've been assigned here." A few of their soldiers raised their chins with pride.

"Threats? Am I in trouble?" she asked in a way that only a twelve-year-old would.

"No, no, certainly not, ma'am."

"Okay... okay... but what do you do?" she asked. She found herself playing with her pigtails.

"Well, just last August we successfully defended the Great Spider Invasion without a single loss." A few of the soldiers clapped and shook hands. "We also poured out as much of the water as we could from the windowsill during the floods last year." Quietly, he added, "I would advise you to close your window during storms, ma'am."

She blushed. "Sorry," Isabelle said with a hand up to her mouth.

“Proud to do it, ma’am.” More somberly, he continued. “Unfortunately, over the years, we’ve lost a few good men. Sucked up in the vacuum while running recon.” A few of the men took off their helmets in respect to those that were no longer with them, holding it to their hearts.

“Oh, those? I’ll get ‘em.” She stood up, stretched her back and rubbed her eyes. “Mom sucked them up, but they got caught in the vacuum. They’re in the closet.”

A few of the soldiers stepped forward. “Could you bring them back? They’re our buddies!”

“Of course!” she said cheerily. After a few moments, she returned with three more of the battalion, each a long-lost soldier. They cheered, hugged, patted each other on the back, reunited when they thought all was lost.

Isabelle smiled ear to ear, so happy to help the strange little soldiers on their mission. Which made her think—what mission? “Hey, so... you said you’re protecting me, right? Why? This is my room. I just sleep here and eat yogurt, and sometimes go on my phone.”

The sergeant suddenly looked serious. “Battalion! Form ranks!” Immediately, each and every soldier lined up, standing at attention. It was a strange mixture of impressive and silly, since they were so tiny and made of plastic. “I would ask for the honour to tell you our mission, ma’am!”

Isabelle just stared.

“Ma’am?”

“Oh—you’re asking for my permission?”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Oh. Yup! Go ahead! Or...permission granted, sergeant!” she said, putting on her best military voice.

“The name of our battalion is Sebastian’s Bastion. It is our duty to protect you, Isabelle, from all harm that we in our abilities can prevent. We have, and will continue to, perform this duty with our best efforts.” As one, the soldiers stomped their feet together.

Isabelle felt her throat tighten up. “Wait. Sebastian told you to do this? My brother?”

Sergeant Warnock took off his helmet and held it to his heart. “I know he was your brother, ma’am. But before he... went away... he gave us this solemn duty. He knew he wasn’t going to be around, and... well, big brothers always want to protect their little sister. He recruited us in his absence.” Even the sergeant looked as if the words did not come easily. Some of his soldiers looked down. “He was a good commander.”

“Yeah,” Isabelle agreed. She wiped away a trailing tear. “I miss him too.”

The soldiers each picked up their weapons, and did as best of an impression of a rough and tumble platoon that they could. They were still on duty, after all.

“So,” Isabelle continued. “What will you do now?”

“What do you mean, ma’am?” Warnock asked.

“Well, I know you’re here, so...Should I just...close the window? It would keep the bugs out.”

Warnock laughed. “And give us nothing to do? No, ma’am, please. We’re signed up here for life.” He cleared his throat. “Plus, the breeze keeps my men cool in the summer. We don’t want to, uh... melt. It’s a concern when you’re made of plastic.”

Isabelle giggled. “Okay. You got it,” she said with a smile.

The sergeant stepped forward. “If I could say one more thing, ma’am.”

“Sure,” she said.

“Sebastian. He was a good kid,” he said, getting a few nods from the soldiers. “His most pressing concern was for how you’d grow up.” Warnock paused for a moment, and cleared his throat again. “He really loved you.”

Isabelle bit her lip, and tiny puddles of water pooled in her eyes. “Thanks,” was all she could muster.

“But if you don’t mind, ma’am, we still have our duties to attend to. It was a pleasure getting to meet you at last.” The men turned back to the window. “Line up, soldiers,” Sergeant Billy Warnock called. “Sebastian’s Bastion, ready for duty!”

### *About the Writer*

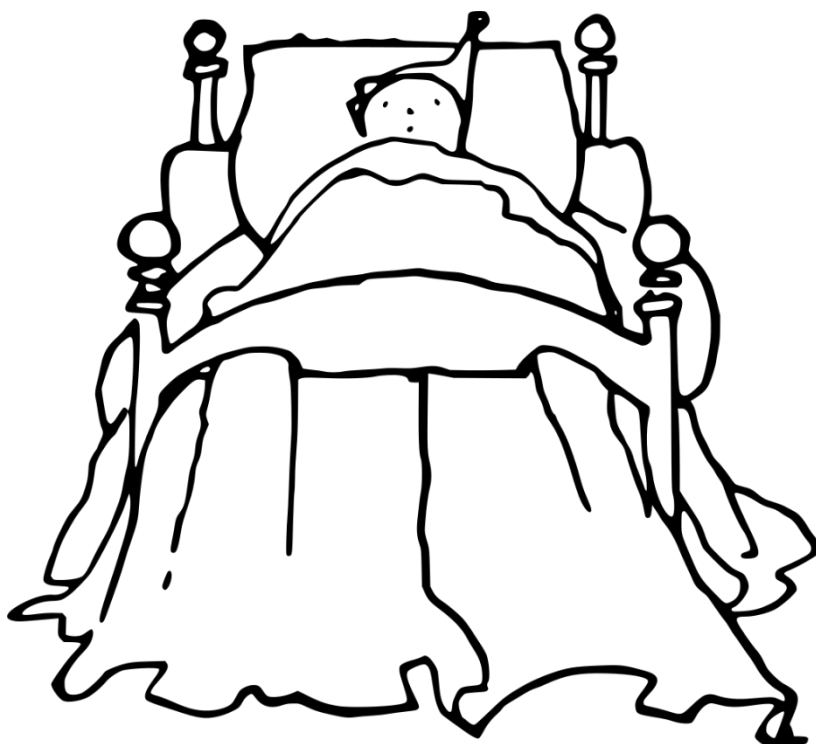
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**Isaac Bouchard** is a teacher out of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, the chilly, friendly place above the United States. When he isn’t writing, he’s either reading or playing soccer—not all that different from his youth.

# The Butt Curse

## by Rachel Michelle Collier

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*Part 1: How the girl got the curse.*

Once upon a time there lived a little girl. This girl was not a mean girl. She was kind, and always tried hard not to be rude. But sometimes others were *extremely* rude to her.

One way that others were rude was by sitting with their butts at the head of her small bed, where she had to lay her face when she slept. Whenever anyone came into the girl's room, they would sit their butts right at the head of her bed! —and sometimes they even farted.

The girl felt helpless. She had no idea how to ask everyone to stop being so rude without offending them, so one day she decided to pray for a magical friend. Over and over she prayed, for three days.

The next day a witch with an unusual face appeared. “What do you wish for, girl?” the witch asked.

“Miss Witch,” the girl said, “I want a curse, but I only have two dollars. How much do curses cost?”

The witch smiled a very evil smile and said, “I only accept candy for payment, so, I’ll charge you two pieces of that silver-wrapped candy in your pocket.”

The girl hesitated. She only had three pieces of silver-wrapped candy left, and it was her favorite kind, and she didn’t know when she would have more.

“How about I pay you one-and-a-half pieces of candy, *and* I give *you* the *biggest* half? That sounds like a fair price, right?” She gave the witch an encouraging smile.

The witch gazed at her, then agreed. “That does sound fair. But why is a kind child like yourself asking a mean ol’, no-good witch like me for a curse?”

The girl blushed. “Well,” she said, “sometimes I feel a little mean too, but people don’t know it because I practice being kind. But they won’t stop sitting with their butts at the head of my bed. And sometimes they even fart.” A few tears rolled down her face.

“Why don’t you ask God to help you?” the witch asked quietly—and quite evilly, the girl thought.

“I did ask Him. He won’t stop them, so I’ll stop them myself. And since He won’t give me something bad that I ask for, I can’t ask Him for a curse. Instead, I tricked Him. I asked Him to send

me a magical person to be my friend. Now I can get a curse from you. See? Tricked Him.”

The witch was silent. Then she leaned down, carefully collected a few tears from the girl’s face onto her witch-fingers, and asked in a terrible voice, “What curse do you want?”

The girl cheered up. “I want a butt curse!” She gave the witch the candy for payment.

The witch put the candy into her pocket while the girl ate her own half-a-piece of candy.

The witch wiped the girl’s tears onto the inside of the empty candy wrapper. Then she waved the silver wrapper behind her witch-butt a few times.

She gave the silver wrapper to the girl.

“There’s your curse, mean girl. Slip it underneath your pillow or your covers under a bottom the next time someone sits in the wrong place. Those who have small bottoms will grow enormous bottoms. Those who have regular bottoms will grow tiny bottoms. And so all your enemies will learn not to sit with their bottoms at the head of your bed.”

The girl suddenly felt unsure, but she held the cursed silver wrapper even tighter.

The witch waited silently, and horribly, for one whole minute. Then she quietly disappeared.

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### *Part 2: How the curse got the girl.*

The girl couldn’t wait to try out her curse. She invited her older sister into her room. Her sister sat her butt right at the head of

her bed! The girl snuck the cursed silver wrapper underneath the covers, under her sister's butt.

Nothing happened.

Her sister was bored so she left a minute later. As she walked down the hallway her butt grew so enormous it almost touched the walls. But the girl didn't see this.

Disappointed, she immediately yelled for her dad to come into her room. He grabbed her pillow and sat his butt right on it! She snuck the cursed silver wrapper underneath the pillow.

Nothing happened as they chatted.

Her dad left a minute later, and as he walked down the hallway his butt became so tiny it made the walls seem twice as wide. But the girl didn't see this.

Now frustrated, she quickly shouted out of her window for her friends to come over and play; they ran over—through her backyard, past the magnolia tree—and once they were in her room, she snuck the cursed silver wrapper underneath the covers under each of them as they sat with their butts right at the head of her bed!

But nothing happened.

She told her friends that she didn't feel well so that they would go right back home.

As her friends walked back home, the girl watched them from her bedroom window. She was angry with everyone—*especially* with the witch.

Two of her friends had regular butts, and as they reached the magnolia tree suddenly their regular butts shrank down as tiny

as a mouse's! One of them had a small butt, and her butt grew as enormous as a small elephant's!

Her friends began shrieking and sobbing, and everybody in the neighborhood ran out to see what was the matter.

The girl gasped at the horrible sight, instantly regretting that she had cursed them. But it was too late. She heard a loud scream from her sister's room, and she knew that her sister's butt had become enormous. Then from the living room she heard her stepmother gasp and drop something, and she knew that her dad's butt had become tiny.

The girl hid under her bed.

The witch appeared under the bed beside her. Startled, the girl banged her head on the bottom of the bed and started crying.

"Please take the curse back—like it never happened! I'll give you back the cursed wrapper!" She slid from under the bed, grabbed the wrapper from underneath the covers, and slid back under the bed.

She held out the cursed silver wrapper to the witch.

But the witch said, "We made a deal. You've already used the curse, plus I've eaten the candy you paid me for the curse."

"You shouldn't have eaten *all* your candy!" the girl wailed.

"I can do what I want with my own candy."

"Well, you shouldn't have given me the curse! I'm only a kid!"

"But you tricked God to make Him send me to you, and you knew I was a mean ol', no-good witch, and you were happy about the curse even though you knew it was a mean thing."

“But *you* gave me the curse!”

“Yes, I gave you the curse, but I didn’t make you use it. *You chose* to use it. You chose meanness all by yourself.”

The girl hated how evil the witch made her feel.

“Take the curse back, you mean ol’, no-good witch!” And she reached out, grabbed the witch by her hair, and jerked her head.

But the witch didn’t struggle. The girl pulled her hair wildly, scratched, hit, and even kicked her, but the witch didn’t fight back.

Finally she got tired and stopped beating the witch.

She lay there on the floor under her bed, breathing hard, and extremely quiet. She was all bruised up herself from banging into her bed while beating the witch.

The witch spoke again: “Why don’t you ask God?”

The girl didn’t answer for a long time. She lay there rubbing her bruises and listening to the commotion her curse had caused.

Then she said, softly, “Because God won’t help me since He’ll know that I tricked Him. Then He’ll probably grow my butt enormous too, for punishment. So I have to hide now.”

“Why don’t you ask God, girl.”

“He won’t like me anymore!” she wailed.

“Ask God.”

For some reason the witch suddenly didn’t seem like a *very* evil witch.

The girl sighed a deep, deep sigh.

“Oh God,” she finally said, “I tricked You so that I could get a curse from a witch, and now I’m sorry that I tricked You because everything is just awful. Please don’t punish me, and please fix this mess because You’re more powerful than the witch. Plus You don’t charge me candy. Amen.”

“Amen,” the witch repeated.

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### *Part 3: How the girl broke the curse.*

The girl frowned. It was quite odd for a witch to say “Amen.”

She peered closely at her magical visitor. The witch—now scratched and bruised up with wild puffs of hair—had a soft, fire-like glow that the girl hadn’t noticed before, and now she *really* didn’t seem like an evil witch.

In fact she didn’t seem like a witch at all. She only seemed like a kind lady, even though she still had the same unusual face.

There were a few tears on the witch’s face, and the girl reached out and gently wiped them away.

“Though I can’t make it like it never happened,” the witch said, “I *can* help you break the curse, using God’s power. This won’t cost you anything, but I do need another silver wrapper.”

The girl unwrapped her last piece of candy and split it with the witch, even though the witch hadn’t asked for anymore candy.

They took a couple of minutes to enjoy their candy (it was now the witch’s favorite, too), and then the witch collected the last tear from her own witch-face, wiped the witch-tear on the new silver wrapper, and waved the new silver wrapper behind her

witch-butt a few times. Then she also waved the wrapper in front of her witch-mouth a few times while laughing pleasantly.

“Now. Call everyone into your room, admit what you did, and apologize. Then have each of them sit on this blessed silver wrapper at the head of your bed. Their bottoms will change back to normal. Then burn both magic wrappers and scatter the ashes outside.

“After that, practice kindness again—including honesty—even though you’ll probably offend people sometimes. They won’t die from being offended, and you won’t die from being thought of as rude.

“And God won’t punish you because this mess has been punishment enough! —don’t you agree? Goodbye, kind girl.”

And the witch was gone.

The girl followed the witch’s instructions. Those with enormous butts could barely fit their entire bottoms onto the head of her bed, and those with tiny butts could barely fit their narrow bottoms onto the blessed silver wrapper. The tiny butts kept sliding off the blessed wrapper, forcing the girl to keep adjusting the wrapper underneath their narrow bottoms.

Finally she just held the blessed silver wrapper underneath their bottoms until it worked. A fart slipped out of her dad because his butt was so narrow it just couldn’t stay in—but the girl just clenched her teeth, and kept her hand there to hold the blessed wrapper still.

The enormous butts got small again, and the tiny butts got regular again.

Then the girl’s parents hugged her and apologized for their rudeness; and also, though God didn’t punish her, her parents certainly did.

Her sister only yelled at her.

Her friends gave her the silent treatment for three whole weeks.

Her neighbors refused to speak to her *or* her family for a year.

Both magic wrappers were burned, and the ashes scattered under the magnolia tree.

The girl never cursed anyone again.

But after that, whenever anyone sat on the kind girl's bed, they only sat at the foot!

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And that's the end of this story about butts and curses. And you are blessed; and so are your enemies, like it or not!

### *About the Writer*

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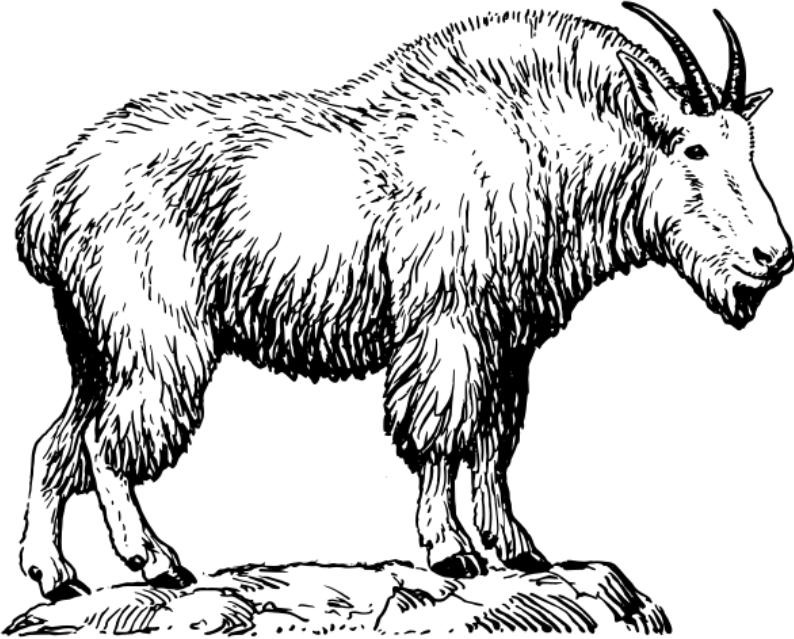
**Rachel Michelle Collier** is from Mississippi, and has also been published in *Heart of Flesh Literary Journal* (the sister-site of *Pure in Heart*), *Fathom Mag*, and *Ekstasis*. She wants you to know that you are loved. Twitter: [@CollierRachelM](https://twitter.com/CollierRachelM)

# Sheep and Mountain Goat



by Laryea Nii Laryea

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**D**uring a sunny and dry day, a mountain goat scaled down the rocks, descending the hill. This was to get a better look at the stranger walking by. Surrounded by rolling hills and jagged stones, his home was not used to the likes of humans.

Curiosity got the better of the mountain goat and he started to follow the man from a distance. He was not that tall but not too short, had no beard and his hair was stubble. He wore a grey

sack and carried a staff and on his feet were sandals made of leather. Nothing remarkable except for the fact that he was human. The mountain goat bet he could take the man on in a fight.

When the man stopped by the river, he took a satchel from his waist belt and filled it up. At this time, the mountain goat had been following him for a while now and descended from the heights of the mountain to converse with the man.

“Where are you heading?” asked the mountain goat.

“I lost my sheep,” the man said. “You see, I am a shepherd with a flock. One fled my watch and I hope to find him soon.”

Knowing there was nothing around them but empty fields and stone, the mountain goat asked, “How do you lose sheep so far away from your flock? Were you not paying attention?”

The shepherd laughed as though it was a joke, and he said, “I lose sheep now and then. Sometimes, they run off before I can catch them.”

“I don’t understand why they need you in the first place. I have lived in the wild all my life. It is only natural that your sheep run away.”

They walked together across the plains, the mountain goat waiting for a response. The shepherd seemed to consider what his newly appointed counterpart had said. It made the man frown deeply, thinking. “Is it all that better to live in the wild?” the shepherd asked.

“It is!” said the mountain goat. “I live in the mountains and sleep in caves. I wake up when I want and go out to graze on whatever bush I find. No one tells me what to do.”

“And what about the wolves and foxes that hide behind the shrubs?”

“I have horns and my hooves can kick.” He kicked the dirt to show off. “I’m tough. I fear no one. It is part of life to be strong and cunning or else you won’t survive for long.”

“You are tough,” the shepherd agreed. “And you have fought many times. My sheep, on the other hand, have me to fight for them. That is why I carry this staff. My flock grazes on green grass while they drink from pools. And at night, they gather by my fire when the night is cold. They talk to me, and I listen. Who do you talk to when night comes?”

The mountain goat did not have to think for long. His answer was plain as the marks on his face. He had no one to talk to. “Why would your sheep leave your flock and run if it’s so great?” the mountain goat asked instead.

And the shepherd answered, “When you find my sheep you can ask them yourself.”

They walked the length of the dry land for a long time, and eventually, they split up to find the sheep on their own. The mountain goat searched behind rocks and stones, not paying attention to the heat of the sun. He got thirsty and made his way to a river. When the mountain goat arrived, he found a sheep bobbing on the surface.

“Are you a sheep?” the mountain goat asked just to be sure.

“No,” the sheep said. “I am a fish.” The sheep did not sound sarcastic.

“You do not look like a fish,” the mountain goat said. “You have wool. It is white though it is wet. You are a sheep.”

“What if I am?” the sheep asked.

“I have a question that has been bothering me all day. Why did you leave your flock?”

The sheep did not answer for some time. Whether he was contemplating what his response might be or whether he did not know himself was beyond the mountain goat. "I looked over the mountains and wondered what was here that I could not have," the sheep said.

"Did you get lost?"

"I did get lost, but I don't want to go back anyway. It has been so long since I left, I know the shepherd would not want me back."

"Are you alone when night comes?" the mountain goat asked. "Do you fight the wolves by yourself?"

"They have not caught me yet," the sheep said. "If I try hard enough, I will not die out here."

Since you won't be returning to the flock, can you teach me how to bleat like a sheep? Can I ask for your coat as well so the shepherd may think I am one of his?" The mountain goat did not want to be alone. He did not want to struggle to survive each night when the wolves appeared.

"You are mine," a voice said above him. The shepherd stood beside the river. He got down on one knee and patted the small goat on the head. "You will come home with me." It was a promise that the mountain goat believed in.

The shepherd then turned to the sheep bobbing on the surface and called out to him. "I am not leaving you behind." As he approached the water, the sheep bobbed away.

"No, don't come for me," the sheep said. "Don't let the water wet you. I will swim to you instead." Whenever the sheep tried to swim, the river would pull him away. He tried again to the same end. Having had enough, he asked for the shepherd's help.

The mountain goat stood by the shore and watched the shepherd wade through the river, beating the current and getting hold of the sheep. Carrying the sheep on his shoulders, he waded back to the riverbank without trouble.

It was a long walk back home, wherever that was. With the sun setting, shadows grew taller, and night opened its many eyes. The shepherd took them through a stretch between two mountain ranges, both long and jagged and curving downward as though about to devour them. They kept close to his feet as they scampered on.

“You will never belong,” the wind whispered. “You know what you are. You know you won’t fit in.”

“Listen to no voice but mine,” said the shepherd. “I have chosen you to become my flock.”

Before the mountain goat, the slope was covered in swaying green grass. The shepherd had been truthful the entire time. Sheep from atop the mountain rushed down to meet the shepherd. When they saw the sheep and the mountain goat, they stopped to examine them. “You found him,” they said. “We thought he was dead.”

The lost sheep bowed his head and took a few steps back. Bowing, the shepherd carried the sheep who had been lost and walked up the slope. “I thought you would rejoice that your friend had come back home. Would you not be glad if you were lost and I came looking for you?” When the shepherd set the sheep down, the others were more welcoming.

After walking for so long, the mountain goat’s tired legs could not keep him up any longer. The shepherd was conversing with the sheep near him, so he approached the closest one and asked, “Ask the shepherd where I should rest for the night. And if it would not be any trouble, can he show me a well to drink from?”

“If you have something to ask, you can talk to me any time you want,” the shepherd said. “And yes, I have a place for you to rest, and I have water for you to drink.”

The time came to sleep, and the sheep were made to rest. The shepherd sat on a hilltop with a harp, playing a lullaby for the flock. The mountain goat knelt at his feet, looking across the fields. A few looked like him. Rough around the edges but with smaller horns. He supposed a mountain goat’s horns would grow smaller when he no longer needed them. Yet the sheep still had bruises and bite marks. Even on this slope, the sheep suffered from wolves. The attacks had left them broken and disfigured, yet they stayed and rested in the shepherd’s presence. “My flock is perfect, isn’t it?” the shepherd said.

“I suppose it is,” the mountain goat said in turn.

### *About the Writer*

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**Laryea Nii Laryea** is a passionate writer with a love for storytelling. Raised in a Christian home, he has found the need to bear fruit for the gospel through short stories.

# The Nesting Dolls



by Arvilla Fee

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I stop as though my feet have brakes, the familiar scent of rose water filling my nose. Mentally, I know I'm not standing in Gram's cottage but in Dee's antique shop, which is my once-a-month spending indulgence and my relentless search for Gram's possessions. Beatrice May Callahan, called Bea, had been everything to me: my best friend, my confidant, my loving, funny Gram. Oh, how I'd adored staying with her in her white cottage with light blue shutters—it was a kid's wonderland with cuckoo clocks, colorful throw rugs, handmade pottery bowls full of plants, wooden toys, jars of cinnamon drops and other candies, and a cat named Peanut.

My parents fought a lot and eventually divorced when I was eight, so Gram let me stay with her every day after school, some weekends, and any other time I could talk my mom into it. Gramp had died when I was one, and she'd never remarried.

Gram was older than Moses (so she said) but could still dance and catch fireflies. She'd died just two months before I graduated high school, a sudden brain aneurysm they said, and I'd taken the loss so hard, I'd nearly failed my finals.

To make her loss even worse, my mom's two brothers had swooped in like vultures, sold Gram's valuables, carted the rest off to Goodwill, and then sold her house. My mom had been furious, but there was little she could do since her brothers were rich, carried attorneys in their back pockets, and had "helped" Gram make her will, naming them as executors. My mom did get Gram's pearl necklace, two pottery bowls, and a framed picture of Gram when Gram was around nineteen years old, the same age I am now. I got Peanut. Had Gram lived, she would've been 84 years old today, and I would've baked an apple pie, which she'd always said was better than cake.

I slowly move forward, looking at various knick-knacks, bowls, and other small trinkets then stop again. There in front of me sits a blue and red Russian nesting doll—but it can't possibly be the same one I played with at Gram's! Gram had always told me the first doll was her gram; the second, her mother; the third, her; the fourth my mom, and the fifth, me—all connected forever. I carefully open the first doll to find a second doll, then another and another—until all five are sitting there. My hands shake as I turn over the smallest doll—there, on the bottom, are the initials BMC. Beatrice May Callahan! Barely containing my emotions, I place each doll back inside the other then take them to the counter.

Dee starts to greet me with her usual smile then frowns. "Hey, Jess! You OK?"

I hold out the doll. "Where'd you get this?" I ask, tears slipping down my face.

Dee tilts her head and reaches out her hand, but I'm afraid to let go.

“It’s OK,” she says softly. “Let me take a look.”

I reluctantly hand it over, and Dee turns the doll over in her hand. “Hon, I don’t know,” she says finally. “I haven’t seen it before; it’s not marked.”

When she hands the doll back, I open it and take out each doll again until I reach the last one. “Look,” I say, turning it over, “BMC – that’s my gram!”

Dee brings her hand to her mouth, her eyes widening. “Lord have mercy! It sure is! But I have no idea how those got here!”

I catch a whiff of rose water again, a scent Gram always spritzed on her face—saying she’d used it long before it became a fashion trend—and begin putting the dolls back together.

“Dee,” I say, my voice shaky. “Can I buy them?”

Dee pats my hand. “No charge, hon. They’re yours!” She wraps the dolls in tissue paper and puts them in a blue box.

I cradle the box next to my heart and thank her.

As I exit the store, I look at the sky and say, “Thanks, Gram. I’ll make your pie today.”

### *About the Writer*

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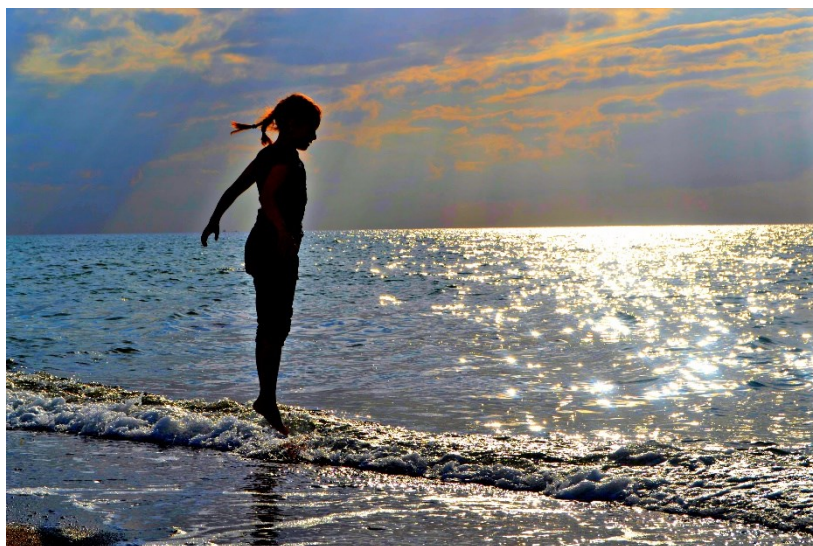
**Arvilla Fee** teaches English Composition for Clark State College and is the poetry editor for the *San Antonio Review*. She has published poetry, photography, and short stories in numerous presses, and her poetry book, *The Human Side*, was just released December 2022. For Arvilla, writing produces the greatest joy when it connects us to each other.

# Spring Dream



by Lauren N. Simmons

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My day begins much like any other. My head pulses with pain on waking. My stomach is nauseous, signaling the vomiting that will no doubt come soon. Since the blindness has fallen on my eyes, I don't sleep well anymore. A dizzy drowsiness is my constant companion during the days, where I can do nothing more than lie in my bed. My life has been like this for two years now.

I am 12 and old enough to be considered a woman now. I long for the day when my parents will announce that they have found my husband. Each day that passes, I am more aware that will never happen.

A new sensation takes hold of my body. "Ima!" I scream for my mother, as my muscles jerk and twitch, unlike anything I've ever

experienced. I can't breathe anymore. I try to talk to Ima, but I struggle for air. I feel the struggle stop as I fall into a deep sleep.

I awake, and my sight is restored. But it is not what it used to be in my life before this sickness took over. I see only in black, white, and shades of gray. None of the different colors I remember from before. I get out of my bed, and I can walk again. Slowly and tentatively at first, but then I run, laughing.

I burst out the door of our home. But I am not greeted by the town street I grew up on. I am greeted by... an ocean. I don't know what to think at first. It's just me and the ocean. Then I walk to the shoreline and dip my toes in the waters. In that instant, the waters turn from gray to beautiful blue, the first color I've seen in years. I sit on a rock and submerge my feet and legs. They haven't been refreshed in so long. After a long while, I stand, and everything changes.

Again, this looks nothing like our neighborhood. Maybe it is even a different country, in a different time. The air has a chill in it and smells of earth, dirt, flowers. Grass grows everywhere, and a white fence hems in the property. The house is also white. It is a rectangle, with windows evenly placed, and two columns, one on each side of a well-centered door. A woman, wearing a scarf in her hair, bends over, tending her garden. "Hello, dear."

"What are you doing?"

"Planting these bulbs before the ground freezes. That way I can watch these tulips bloom in the spring. Just as you will," she smiles at me.

Before I can ask what she means, she disappears. But I still get to see the flowers slowly bloom. Their deep purple reveals itself. The only vivid hue, all else is still black, white, and grays. Purple was never a color I saw often when I was young. It was reserved for royalty. But now I just stand and wonder at its beauty.

It is not long before I am transported to another place and time. This place reminds me more of home—and yet it is not. This place is an explosion for the senses. Music fills the streets. I can taste the street food and spices from the market without putting anything in my mouth, their smell is so strong. For the first time in years, my stomach grumbles from hunger. A nearby street vendor hears and hands me a piece of bread. It is flat and in the shape of a circle. There is such a richness to everything here. A saree hangs in the next booth. I rub its silk between two of my fingers. People are throwing colored powder at one another. The powder lands on me, and in that moment, it is as if life has gone from black, white, and gray to all vibrant colors. Pink. Orange. Yellow. Green. Everything has color again. In all the chaos, I hear Someone whisper to me, “It is not your time yet.”

And then there is nothing but White Light, and it has a voice that calls out to me, “Little girl, get up!”

I open my eyes. I am back in my own room. And I truly can see again. A Man I have never met is holding my hand, and I follow His lead to stand. He commands that I be fed. I am starving, and the feeling causes me to realize I never thought I would be healed. All I can feel is gratitude.

“My lamb,” Abba says while cradling my head. He always calls me that, “lamb,” because that is the meaning of the name Rachel. My name.

I overhear the Man tell my parents, when they are alone, to tell no one. “Jairus,” He says to my Abba, “your faith has restored your daughter to you this day.”

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## Author's note:

I have always loved the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter.

The ocean scene represents the fact that she will be healed, restored, and refreshed.

The garden scene is set in 1950s America, similar to *The Twilight Zone*. It represents that she will bloom and grow as she had wished.

The final “dream” sequence is set in India during the spring festival of Holi. It is a color festival, and it represents that she will get to experience all of the *color*—all of the good things life has to offer. Jesus didn't just raise her from the dead and leave her be. He gave her an abundant life.

Records of Jairus' daughter can be found in Mark 5:21-43, Matthew 9:18-26, and Luke 8:40-56.

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## About the Writer

**Lauren N. Simmons** is a freelance writer who lives in the Kansas City area with her husband and daughter. Her work has appeared in various magazines and devotionals, including *Cadet Quest*, *Deaf Devo*, *Focus on the Family* (as a Hacks & Facts contributor), *Keys for Kids*, and *Unlocked*.

# Hard Scrabble Singings



**By Luisa Kay Reyes**

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Colt felt the hunger gnawing in his stomach. Normally, he was adept at simply ignoring the feeling of his stomach devouring itself in a feeble effort to obtain some sort of nutrition. But today, it was accompanied by a light-headedness that was making it nearly impossible for him to concentrate.

Colt stared out the window of the wooden school building. Their recess for lunch would begin soon, and it couldn't come at a

better time. Although, his lunchtime fare was the same as always: a plain lard sandwich.

“Spell *Roosevelt*,” the teacher said, catching Colt in the middle of his reverie.

Colt turned his head back toward the front of the classroom, in a bit of surprise.

“Spell *Roosevelt*!” the teacher repeated, a note of disapproval tinging her voice.

“R-O-O-S-E-V-E-L-T!” spelled Willadeene proudly from the seat behind him.

“Well done,” the teacher said, which led to Willadeene smiling broadly at her approval.

Not that Colt could see it, given she was sitting behind him. But, somehow, he sure enough could feel it, even so. For Willadeene was always eager to outdo Colt whenever she could in school, given that he was the closest thing she had to an academic rival in the single room country schoolhouse.

Colt merely shrugged his shoulders. Of course, he knew how to spell *Roosevelt*. Why it was pronounced as though it were related to the prized flower, he knew not. But, these days, the name “Roosevelt” was on the tip of everyone’s tongue. For there was something called the Great Depression going on all over the country, with many hanging their hopes on this one man to help deliver them out of the misery of poverty that was seeping into the nation. Why folks were letting themselves get so excited, Colt knew not. After all, the one constant, in these hills and hollows that comprised the woods of Southern Biggs County, was hard scrabble, hard hearts, and hard times.

At last, the teacher announced recess for lunch, and the students all excitedly rushed outside to enjoy the sunny day while eating their noontime fare. Colt decided to join his younger sister,

Viola, underneath one of the shade trees to eat their lard sandwiches.

“Are you well?” she asked him when he joined her.

“Of course,” Colt replied, a bit surprised by her question.

“Then why did you tarry so in spelling today?” she asked him. “You’re usually quick with those big, fancy words.”

“Oh, that,” Colt stated with a faint sigh. “I just wasn’t thinkin’ about no spelling words today. That’s all.”

And at precisely that moment, Willadeene, with her head turned up just a little, walked past them holding up her sandwich. Sure enough, even from afar, one could tell it was filled with plenty of meat in it, not just lard like the ones he and Viola and the other hard scrabble students had. But Colt was too hungry to let Willadeene’s boastful ways bother him for the time being. He held up his own plain lard sandwich, and took the biggest bite of it that he could. To say that it tasted good would be a lie, but to say that it helped his hunger some would be a truth.

Thankfully, it was Friday. When school let out for the day, Colt joined his sister Viola for their daily walk home.

“Ouch!” Colt said out loud as he accidentally stepped on a sharp twig with his bare feet. The twig managed to scratch a part of the soles of his feet that hadn’t already been scraped raw several times before.

Colt picked up the twig and broke it in half. Walking barefoot during the school week was common for them and many of the others, so it wasn’t unexpected. This particular twig just hurt more than usual. Nevertheless, Colt and Viola continued their way homeward with Colt trying to step a bit more lightly than usual on his hurt foot.

“How does Willadeene manage to have both shoes for school and meat in her sandwiches?” Viola asked after a moment. “She goes to school, same as the rest of us,” she added in a genuinely inquisitive tone, her light brown eyes held in a wide-eyed wonder.

Colt laughed a little before his thoughts turned pensive. “She’s one of the lucky ones. Her daddy has a job. He works for the railroad.”

“Oh,” was all Viola could say to that. She was still young and not certain what all had been happening. She’d heard enough over the years to make out that “fussin’ and fightin’” was the biggest claim to fame many of the grown men had around these parts. One day, their Pa had wagered on some cock fights with a hefty supply of liquor on hand, only to end up fussin’ and fightin’ so much he made the cocks look tame and didn’t outlive them.

Viola sighed, and Colt merely shrugged his shoulders.

Saturday came with Colt and Viola trying to help their mama with the chores as much as possible. They had but a small, ramshackled cabin to call home, but it was what they had, so it was best to patch it up where it needed fixing. On Sunday, Colt decided to set out early in search of a good piece of lumber that could be used to patch up the latest hole that had appeared in their rustic abode. Too early, it turned out—Colt quickly hid his lean frame behind some bushes along the red dirt road that people used on their way to Church. Somehow, he just didn’t much care to be seen. He and Viola were strictly forbidden from going to any Sunday meetings. They didn’t really know why, but their mama had sternly forbidden it with the phrase, “Church just isn’t the place for people like us.” It was a phrase she repeated over and over, until they finally ceased asking her.

Thus, Colt safely hid while watching the ladies walking past in their best pastel-hued, calico-printed, flour sack dresses. Some of them were accompanied by a few of the school kids and their

younger toddler-aged siblings, skipping along beside them. Surprisingly, a few of the weather-beaten men he knew from these environs were managing to give an air of country-respectability in their clean overalls.

When, suddenly, the sound of horses' hooves came approaching. Old Widow MacLean rushed by in her late husband's peddler's cart—It was quite the rickety old thing, but proud of it she was; she blithely stirred up a flurry of red dust that made everybody cough while she was riding past them. Only this time, as she rounded the bend, a rattlesnake hissed nearby and scared one of the horses. In an instant, the cart overturned, throwing Old Widow MacLean flat down on the red dirt.

Colt jumped from behind the bushes to try and calm down the horses, lest they drag her off in such a manner. Old Widow MacLean accepted his aid none too graciously, for the only thing she could think about was the humiliation of being seen sprawled out in the dirt in such an ill fashion. Colt was not troubled in the least by her ungratefulness, expecting little else. Then, while reaching to help her back up into the cart, his eyes beheld the most glorious sight he had seen since he was a small babe in his dear mama's arms—a casserole dish, full of green beans and bacon, had spilled onto the ground. With his hands trembling, he fought the desire to let Old Widow MacLean fall back down so he could devour the unexpected culinary delight before the large black ants of the forest took note.

“Thank Heavens the chicken and dumplin's didn't spill out too much,” Old Widow MacLean said once Colt helped her back into her seat comfortably. She glanced into the back of the cart. “It wouldn't do to show up at a singin' empty handed.” And off at a breakneck speed she went, without so much as a thank you or a by-your-leave.

Blinking his eyes from the dust from Old Widow MacLean's cart, Colt wasted no time in leaning down and grabbing a fistful of the green beans. The trembling he had felt in his hands now

spread throughout the rest of his body, as he was beside himself—to actually taste a bit of bacon seemed like the closest thing to Paradise he could think of. What a treat.

“May I have some, too?” Viola interrupted as she came bounding up the way. A few people were still walking by, but the delicious taste of the green beans and bacon caused Colt to lose all reservations over being seen. At least for the present.

“Willadeene was telling me about these at school,” Viola said. “She told me that for all of Old Widow MacLean’s ornery ways, she sure does make a good mess of beans.”

“What I wouldn’t give to eat some more of these!” Colt exclaimed while handing Viola the last few of the bits and pieces of bacon and beans he had managed to grab.

“It isn’t impossible, you know,” Viola said, her light brown eyes widening upon tasting the savory vegetables.

“Sure it is,” Colt replied, letting his shoulders droop. “For us, at least.”

“I reckon you’re probably right,” Viola responded, despondently. But then, inspired by a surge of optimism at the thought of eating something besides lard, she continued with, “Willadeene was telling me at school last week that at the ‘Shady Grove Christian Harmony’ singing next Sunday, singers don’t have to bring a dish.”

“Oh, that Willadeene. Filling your head with such nonsense. You know very well Mama won’t let us go to church,” Colt said, with a touch of bitterness that surprised even him. “And besides that, we can’t even sing Christian Harmony.”

The light of optimism that had briefly lit up Viola’s trusting eyes disappeared. “But, Willadeene said she could teach me,” she muttered softly under her breath. The harshness of their reality

set in once again, prompting her to hand back to Colt the last piece of bacon that she held with her fingers.

Colt watched Viola as she took off with her feet scuffling along in the dirt. Most of the hard scrabble folks around these parts had any illusions drummed out of them long before they were Viola's impressionable young age. So he felt it was good for Viola to be confronted with the reality of struggling just to barely survive. It was best to adjust to it sooner rather than later.

But then he heard Viola start to softly sing a little melody, "*A Billy Goat, was feeling fine. He ate six shirts off of Sal's clothesline...*" And Colt felt it come over him, too, this strange light of hope that he had seen in her eyes. The hope that something could be different for once.

"How?" he yelled at her, to make sure she could hear him.

"How what?" Viola turned and asked him in return.

"How do we sing Christian Harmony?" he queried further.

"I don't rightly know," Viola answered. "But Willadeene told me a triangle means *Do*".

The next week at school, Colt and Viola begged Willadeene to escape with them during recess to learn all about the art of shape-note singing. Thankfully, Willadeene was sent to singing school every month by her parents, making her quite the little expert in the Christian Harmony acapella style. And she relished this notion of feeling important enough to be teaching Colt something. After all, it didn't harm her reputation any for the other schoolkids to know that her parents were able to spare her from daily chores on the weekends long enough to send her to singing school.

With the arrival of Sunday morning, Colt felt himself tempering his excitement with some apprehension.

“Don’t worry,” Viola came up to him with her eyes sparkling as she took note of his hesitation. “I told Mama we were meeting up with Willadeene to go over some of our lessons for school. She said it was okay. And since we’ve been working on Christian Harmony at school, it is actually true.”

Relieved that this first hurdle was out of the way, Colt and Viola set about on their way to Shady Grove. The morning sun bore through the leaves of the trees and came down on them hard as they made their way along the dirt paths through the forest. The first hill they encountered led to Sardis. He had heard tell it was a Methodist Church and the Tates went there. The next hill they passed led to Old Zephi. A Baptist Church, he had heard, one that he hoped to go to one day since it had a spring nearby that lots of people said produced really good healing waters. The Haywards, he had heard, were the ones who went there.

“I sure hope we get to Shady Grove before noon,” Viola interrupted his thoughts as they kept trudging along. “Willadeene says that’s when they serve the food.”

“I know,” Colt replied, wiping perspiration off of his brow, and commiserating with Viola and the temptation to turn back before they expired in the humid heat. But, *those green beans*. He just couldn’t get those savory little vegetables out of his mind. All week at school—as they ate their sandwiches filled with nothing but the same old lard and were told to be grateful for it—he hungered for Sunday so he could taste something new.

“Just remember, a triangle means *Do*,” he said to Viola with a teasing grin. And onward on their mission they went.

The hills leading to the various churches in the woods seemed to get higher and higher as they continued strolling past. And this last one, the one that Willadeene had told them led to Shady Grove, seemed like the highest of them all. Feeling weak from the long walk in the heat, coupled with stomachs that were clamoring for some nutrition, Viola and Colt hung their heads

with a groan at the sight of it. Yet, they'd come too far to acquiesce to defeat now. Slowly but surely, they climbed up the path that led to the top.

Just as they were reaching its peak, they saw it: a white clapboard Church that seemed to rise out of nowhere, with some cement tables lining the cemetery to the side of it. Some of the tables were already covered with tablecloths where people were planning to set out the food. Viola and Colt looked at each other. Spent from their long walk they might be, but seeing those tables made them forget it. They took off at a gallop the rest of the way to the Church.

Upon reaching the front of the building, Viola and Colt quietly opened the doors and tried to tiptoe their way to the Holy Square.

*"Where we'll never grow old..."* The song was being led by a tall, imposing, white-haired, elderly man standing in the middle of the square in the front, the place where all of the singers sat with their books in hand.

Even though Viola and Colt were tiptoeing as silently as possible—*creak!*—the wooden floors made a loud sound. All of the singing stopped.

"I told you they was comin'!" Willadeene proudly exclaimed to her grandfather, the older man leading the singing at the front.

The rest of the room remained silent.

Colt and Viola stood in place. It seemed like every eye in the room was staring at them, and they weren't quite sure why.

Unbeknownst to them, while they were a bedraggled looking pair to begin with, their trek through the woods in the hot Southern sun had compounded the matter in a most awful sort of way. Their stringy hair, full of perspiration, clung to their dust-splattered faces, and their tattered clothing was barely

discernible beneath the layers and layers of red dirt that had accumulated upon them.

“They can lead ‘Twilight is Falling,’” Willadeene finally broke in. “I’ve been teaching it to them,” she continued, her chest puffing out with pride.

Her grandpa glanced disbelievingly in her direction, not really wanting to encourage any ridiculous folly. However, as he took in his red-headed granddaughter’s endearing smile, he became powerless to do anything but yield to her suggestion.

“Come on up,” he said, with a reluctant command while motioning for Colt and Viola to walk to the front. “Number two-forty-eight,” he called out, more firmly now, in a deep booming voice to the rest of the folks sitting there as they looked for the page number in their books. “Words only.”

Silently, Colt and Viola made their way to the front. They either knew most of the people in the sanctuary or knew of them. But had they been in a room full of complete city slicker strangers, they couldn’t have felt more out of place.

“What do we do?” Viola whispered to Willadeene, who was feeling most eager to show off her teaching skills.

“Just set the key and then sing,” she said. “And move your arms up and down with the beat like I taught you.”

“*Twilight is falling soft o’er the sea,*” Viola and Colt sang softly at first. “*Shadows are stealing dark on the lea,*” they continued, growing ever more confident with every verse. “*Borne on the night winds, voices of yore,*” they were feeling at home now. “*Come from the far off shore.*”

“I’ve had it!” exclaimed Old Widow MacLean from the far corner of the room. She let her Christian Harmony book slide out of her hands, and it landed with a thud on the wooden floor below. “I ain’t singin’ any praises to the God above alongside a

pair of no account Cluetts,” she said while standing up to leave in a huff.

Viola and Colt stared at each other. They hadn’t even noticed Old Widow MacLean sitting there when they walked in. And the mention of their last name made them wince.

“Nonsense,” came a strong voice from a distinguished-looking gentleman sitting on one of the pews alongside the Holy Square. “They are Wrights, too. And since when is a Wright of no account?”

Viola and Colt stood frozen in place as they saw Old Widow MacLean glare at the gentleman and angrily sit back down.

“Please go on,” a young lady in the back said after an uncomfortable pause. “Y’all’s voices are lovely.”

Seeing Willadeen’s granddad nod in approval, they continued on leading the chorus: “*Far away beyond the starlit skies, Where the love-light never, never dies...*”

“Well, it is about that time,” Willa’s grandpa interjected when the song was over. “Brother Daniel, will you lead us in the blessing?” A tall, white-bearded man stood up and led them in a small prayer before the feast was to begin.

“Y’all did it!” Willadeene said enthusiastically once the blessing was over. “Of course y’all had it easy. You just did the words and not the notes.”

“Thank you, Willadeene!” Viola said happily.

“When do we eat?” Colt asked, unconcerned about little else at the time being.

“Right now, you hungry little billy goat!” Willadeene said. “Come follow me.”

She led them outside to the gray cement tables they had noticed earlier. Only now, the cement tables were taking on a new form. The matrons of every family were laying down their colored tablecloths while spreading out their casserole dishes and cakes along the tops of the tables. Never in any of the books at school, or in his wildest imagination, had Colt ever seen so much food in his entire life.

“I always like to scout out which dishes I’m going to try first,” Willadeene said while pulling them alongside her, something which Colt and Viola felt was kind of needless. For they were ready to eat it all. But Willadeene persisted. She showed them, one by one, which red velvet cake was the best. Which sweet potato casserole to try first. Whose green beans with bacon could nearly rival that Old Widow MacLean’s. The lima beans, black-eyed peas, and slices of tomatoes she usually liked best. The egg custards to try. The huckleberry cobblers to indulge in. And the cornbread that was the most delicious of them all.

Taking their places in line once the plates and dishes were all laid out, Colt, Viola, and Willadeene piled their plates higher and higher with more and more food. Viola hid some rolls of cornbread in her pockets for later. Colt understood now why so many of the Christian Harmony songs talked about their Heavenly Home, with mansions bright and fair in the hereafter. If they had food like this there, he felt ready to go there, too.

Once the noon hour set aside for the dinner was over with, many of the folks piled back inside the church for the afternoon singing. Everyone was a bit sleepy after the hearty meal, but eager to keep on singing, even so, with Viola and Colt being welcomed now as part of the singers.

“I wish all of the singings were like that,” Viola said once the afternoon singing was over, and she and Colt started reluctantly plodding back home. “Where singers don’t have to bring a dish.”

“Me, too,” Colt said. “I never knew so much food existed!”

Wearily they traipsed along the rest of the way back home.

To their surprise, upon reaching their rudimentary home, there was an automobile in the yard. Their mama was standing on the front porch waiting for them with the distinguished gentleman from church standing beside her.

“So,” she said, her face bright red, “y’all went to church. Haven’t I told you never to go to church?”

Had they been gagged with a spoon, Viola and Colt could not have stood there in a more hushed state, their heads hanging down low.

“Hush now, Elsie”, the gentleman said. “It is time to let bygones be bygones. Just because you ran off to marry that no account Cluett doesn’t mean these young’uns have to suffer for it, too. You’ve learned your lesson.”

Their mama lowered her eyes in agreement.

“And besides, it seems to me these little ones have more Wright in them than Cluett.”

Viola and Colt looked at the gentleman quizzically. That was the second time that day that the name Wright had been mentioned, and they knew not what it meant.

“Children,” their mama said as she stood up to embrace them. “This is your grandfather, Doctor Wright. My daddy.”

Viola and Colt were overwhelmed. Their mama had never talked about her side of the family, ever. In fact, they didn’t know she even had a family, much less the well-known Doctor Wright. Why, it was said that even people from Europe came over to study medicine under him. Not knowing what else to do, Viola dipped down into a curtsy before him.

Doctor Wright let out a chuckle.

Truth to be told, it was a bit ironic. Old Widow MacLean had been a Daugherty before she married. And all of the Daughertys were known for being good singers, in the shape-note singing circuit. Only she had married a MacLean. And, suffice it to say, the MacLean blood won out in her progeny, with not a one of the seven of them being able to sing a note on key. Doctor Wright reckoned he couldn't blame Old Widow MacLean for being all fired up at Shady Grove today. He'd set things right by her, and make sure she could walk into the next singing carrying the biggest ham the county had ever seen.

Doctor Wright, himself, had been furious when Elsie eloped to marry that no account Cluett—so much so that he had cut off all communication with her whatsoever. He only gleaned about her what he could from the folks down at Keaton's Country Store. And Elsie had been so furious at his fury, that she had returned his non-communicating favor.

But now Doctor Wright could see that there was hope in his grandchildren. He was getting on in age, and could use some smart, young apprentices to help him with his doctoring.

"Your mama has been worried about you, Elsie," he said. "It is time for you to come home."

Elsie took a look around at their meager surroundings, and she realized that he was right. She knew her daddy could be hardheaded like she was. But, more than once, she had worried she wasn't doing right by Colt and Viola.

"Pack your things," she said. And reaching her arms in a group hug around her daddy, Colt, and Viola, she said, "It is time to go home."

### About the Writer

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**Luisa Kay Reyes** has had pieces featured in *The Raven Chronicles*, *The Windmill*, *The Foliate Oak*, *The Eastern Iowa Review*, and other literary magazines. Her essay, “Thank You,” is the winner of the April 2017 memoir contest of *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. Her Christmas poem was a first-place winner in the 16th Annual Stark County District Library Poetry Contest. Additionally, her essay, “My Border Crossing,” received a Pushcart Prize nomination from *Port Yonder Press*, and two of her essays have been nominated for the “Best of the Net” anthology. One of her essays was recently featured on *The Dirty Spoon* radio hour.

## Recipe: Easy Cheesy Green Bean Casserole

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In the story “Hard Scrabble Singings,” Viola comes up with the idea to sing at church for food after tasting Old Widow MacLean’s green bean casserole. Follow this easy recipe, and you’ll be able to make your own delicious green bean casserole (the bacon flavor especially makes it something special). Bring this yummy dish to church, share it with family or friends, or use it to bless someone who may need a nice warm meal.

### Ingredients

- 2 16-ounce cans of Green Beans, drained
- 2 cups shredded Sharp Cheddar Cheese
- 1 10.5-ounce can of Cream of Mushroom Soup
- 1 cup of Whole Milk

- 3/4 cup of Real Bacon Bits (or about 4-6 strips of crispy bacon, crumbled)
- 1/4 teaspoon Black Pepper
- 1 6-ounce container of French-Fried Onions

## Steps

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees—remember to get a grownup's permission before using the oven!
2. In a medium bowl, combine the green beans, cheese, cream of mushroom soup, milk, bacon bits, and pepper. Mix together well.
3. Add half of the container of french-fried onions. Mix together.
4. Pour the mixture into a baking dish.
5. Put in the oven, and bake for 25 minutes.
6. Carefully remove the casserole from the oven (you may need an adult for this), and add the rest of the french-fried onions on top.
7. Bake for 5 more minutes.
8. Serve hot, or refrigerate it to serve the next day.

# Forest Friends

by **Angel Tate**

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Read about **Angel Tate** on page 11.

# Laughing with Friends

by Nadja Bullis

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## About the Artist

**Nadja Bullis** is a 25-year-old freelance illustrator who works with watercolor. She has worked on several published children's books, including a Christian one called *I Am a Good Neighbor Like Jesus* by Charissa Bates. Fun fact: Nadja was previously homeschooled.

# I Run to You

by **Angel Tate**

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Read about **Angel Tate** on page 11.

# Jungle Animals

by Phyllis Green

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## About the Artist

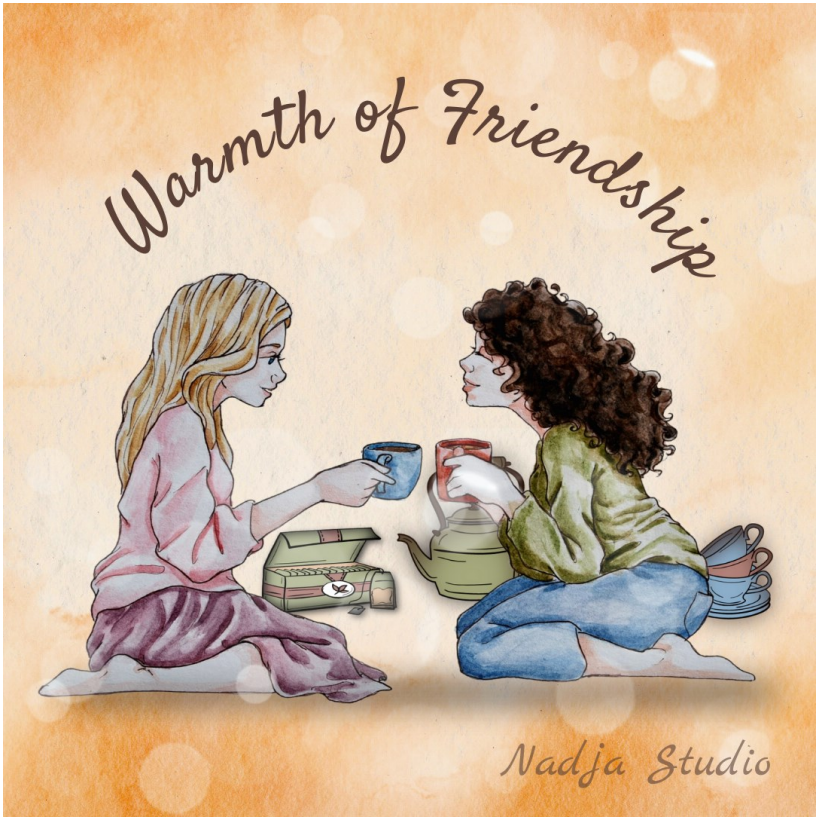
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**Phyllis Green's** art has been in *ArLiJo 123*, *Inscape*, *Foreshadow*, *Earth and Alter*, *Midwest Zen*, *Cinematic Codes Review* and other journals.

# Warmth of Friendship

**by Nadja Bullis**

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Read about **Nadja Bullis** on page 97.

# Spring Cross

by Joshua Dease

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-joshua (Easter 2022).

## Artist Description:

I have an artist friend from the internet named Benjamin. He collects kitschy Christian/spiritual art and comics. He shared a picture of this “spring cross,” a painting he found at a local thrift store in a wooden frame, knowing nothing about it, but captivated by its simple DIY beauty. The kind of art you would find in an old basement Sunday school room next to the flannelgraph.

Benjamin makes contemplative paper cut art revolving around the Church calendar, so he recreated his thrift store treasure in that medium. After seeing this, I felt inspired to create my own version of this Spring Cross.

While there are certainly a vast number of prominent Christian artists throughout the history of the Church, it is these kinds of pieces left behind by unknown and unnamed followers that I often find myself fascinated by. That is likely the space the weird little comics I make will occupy long after I am done drawing. And I think that is good and beautiful.

## *About the Artist*

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**Joshua Dease** is an independent cartoonist living in Florida with his wife, Ashley, and their kids, Jules + Davy. He teaches a variety of high school humanities classes. He is an adjunct professor of history. Joshua also pastors Church in the Garden, an outdoor gathering space for homeless and housed folks for a non-profit organization called Wear Gloves.

# Hérons with the Cross

by **Phyllis Green**

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Read about **Phyllis Green** on page 99.

# Cross Artwork

**by Pat Anderson**

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Read about **Pat Anderson** on page 37.

# Prayers

**by Carl Scharwath**

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Model Name: Lorna Datario.

### About the Artist

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**Carl Scharwath** has appeared globally with 175+ journals selecting his writing or art. Carl has published three poetry books and his latest book, *Playground of Destiny*, features poetry, short stories and photography (Impspired Press). His two photography books were published by Praxis in Africa. His photography was also exhibited in the Mount Dora Center for the Arts gallery and The Leesburg Center for the Arts. Seven global poets have also selected his photography to grace the covers of their published books. Carl was the art editor for *Minute Magazine* (4 years), is a contributing editor for *ILA Magazine*, was nominated for The Best of the Net Award (2021) by *Penumbra Magazine*, and was a finalist for the Mary Cassatt award for photography. He is also a competitive runner and a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black-belt in Taekwondo.

## Game: STAR WARS or the Bible?

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This fun game-of-quotes was first introduced to my daughter through our church's Preteen ministry. You can find different versions of it on many kids' ministry websites.

The game is simple, yet fun: choose if the quote is from a *Star Wars* movie or the Bible. Sound easy? It may be harder than you think...

1. Do. Or do not. There is no try.
2. Now fulfill your destiny, and take your father's place at my side.
3. If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.
4. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.
5. Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.

6. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.
7. Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.
8. I find your lack of faith disturbing.
9. Your eyes can deceive you, do not trust them.
10. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
11. Fear is the path to the dark side.
12. I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.
13. To answer before listening; that is folly and shame.
14. Who's more foolish? The fool or the fool who follows him?
15. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
16. Luminous beings we are, not this crude matter.
17. There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.
18. Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.
19. Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny.
20. Let go of your hate.

21. My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart.

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Find the answers on page 111.

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The game "*Star Wars* or the Bible?" is purely for entertainment purposes only.



# STAR WARS or the Bible? – ANSWERS

1. Star Wars. Yoda, *The Empire Strikes Back*.
2. Star Wars. The Emperor, *Return of the Jedi*.
3. Bible. John 5:31.
4. Star Wars. Yoda, *The Phantom Menace*.
5. Bible. Proverbs 29:11.
6. Bible. Matthew 15:11.
7. Bible. Psalm 120:6.
8. Star Wars. Darth Vader, *A New Hope*.
9. Star Wars. Obi-Wan Kenobi, *A New Hope*.
10. Bible. Romans 12:21.
11. Star Wars. Yoda, *The Phantom Menace*.
12. Bible. Matthew 12:6.
13. Bible. Proverbs 18:13.
14. Star Wars. Obi-Wan Kenobi, *A New Hope*.
15. Bible. Proverbs 4:23.
16. Star Wars. Yoda, *The Empire Strikes Back*.
17. Bible. Proverbs 14:12.
18. Bible. Proverbs 10:12.
19. Star Wars. Yoda, *The Empire Strikes Back*.
20. Star Wars. Luke, *Return of the Jedi*.
21. Bible. Proverbs 3:1.



## Who is God?

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

Here is what the Bible tells us about God:

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

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

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

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

After He died, He came back from the dead three days later. This miracle proved that He had power over life and death, and

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

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

#### Bible References:

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

- “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)
- “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)



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