

Heavenly Visits

Book Three

Visits Sixty-one to Ninety



By Jerry Mobley

Heavenly Melodies

Visit Sixty-one

Doris is accustomed to the semi-darkness; her eyesight began to dim a few years ago when she reached her ninety-fifth birthday. She still has the dexterity in her frail fingers to work on a crochet project and even though she has difficulty seeing the progress of the design or the finished product, her sense of touch conveys the knowledge that a thing of beauty is being or has been created.

She is busy working on a pair of baby booties for the music minister's expected baby girl; the shower is scheduled at the church this coming Sunday afternoon. Doris' daughter, Janis, will come by and take Doris to church and then after lunch, back to the church for the shower.

Doris has lived at the nursing home since she was eighty-four. Doris had become very weak and her left leg had given out on more than one occasion and she had fallen. She had not broken any bones, but her daughters thought it best that she come here to live. Janis and her sisters had difficulty making the decision for Doris to live here, but it had been for the best. Doris has good meals prepared and the right kind of care provided. She loves the nurses as they do her and she has made many new friends at the Home.

"It's time for bed, Doris". It is Helen, a registered nurse, at the Shady Valley Nursing Home. Helen examines the one bootie that Doris has completed. She says, "I don't know how you do it, Doris. This is so perfect and beautiful. I wish I had the skill and patience to make something so pretty. Even though you can't see too well, you make such perfect items."

"You're too kind, Helen. I've been doing this for many, many years. My Albert says that the angels guide my hands. I can teach you sometime."

"Thank you, Doris, but I don't think I have the talent nor the persistence to stick to it." Helen helps Doris get ready for bed. She places the unfinished crochet project on the bedside table. She continues, "Maybe I'll come by tomorrow and you can teach me a little. I might be able to pick it up."

Doris replies, "I bet you'll be surprised how fast you will learn. Goodnight, Helen."

Helen stops at the door. Before she turns out the light, she says, "Remember, Doris, your niece is coming tomorrow to play her violin."

Doris replies, "Yes. I remember. I'm looking forward to Betty coming."

Albert is standing next to a big rock. He looks out across a wide, wide gorge. It is so wide that he cannot see the other side. Besides space and time, there is a mist, a fog that separates one side from the other. The beauty and peace of heaven is protected from the ugliness and evil of the world. He leans out over the edge and looks down into a deep, dark chasm; the bottom also cannot be seen.

Albert feels the touch on his arm and he turns to see Blasdon standing next to him. Albert says, "Hello, Blasdon. What are you doing here?"

“The Lord says I should be with you while you are so near the edge.”

“I should have known Jesus would have you watching out for me even here in heaven.”

Blasdon says, “The Lord has always wanted you protected.” He watches as Albert fine tunes his violin. Blasdon remarks, “You know they can’t hear you play. Even if they could, it would do no good... it’s too late for them. I just don’t understand your resolution.”

Albert puts some rosin on his bow and asks, “Have you ever felt that you didn’t do enough; that if you had just taken the time or effort to do something, it would have made a difference?”

Blasdon thinks a moment and then replies, “No. But we are created different. I get my instructions from God and I carry out his plan. You, on the other hand, have the burden of ‘choice’. Where I don’t have ‘choice’, you do. That’s the way the Lord wants it. You can choose to carry out his plan or not.”

“Well, sometimes I feel like I didn’t make the right choices, that I ignored what God wanted me to do and now the result of my disobedience has caused some so dear to God to live in nothingness at the bottom of this chasm... forever.”

“It might not have made any difference anyway. Have you thought about that? Everyone that resides in the pit had plenty of opportunities to accept God’s offered love. You weren’t the only one sent their way.”

“I know, Blasdon, but maybe my testimony would have pushed them to make the right choice.” Albert places his bow on the strings.

Blasdon interrupts, “And why do you play for them? As I said, they can’t hear you and even if they could, it would remind them of the opportunities they failed to accept. It won’t make them feel better or be able to endure the loneliness of their isolation or the burning heat from the harsh caress of the evil they chose.”

“I know, Blasdon. I play for God now... but also for myself. I play as a reminder of the chances I failed to take and to say I’m sorry... maybe not so much for them, but for myself... just to say ‘I’m sorry I didn’t care enough to tell you how much God loves you’. Besides, I play for Doris and perhaps any others in the world that want to hear.”

“I understand. Hopefully, there will be a loved one arriving soon.”

Albert continues to play the sweet old melodies. He says, “In God’s good time, Blasdon. In God’s good time.”

It is about seven o’clock in the morning. Doris is still asleep. In her dreams, she hears Albert’s violin serenading her. She is softly awakened by the familiar and simple melody of ‘Jesus is tenderly calling thee home, calling today, calling today’. She opens her eyes and says, “Your music spills right out of heaven, child. It is so beautiful.”

Betty replies, "That's the way Grandpa taught me, Grandmother. He always said that I should play as if God was the only one listening, then to the ones I love and finally the rest get what's left over."

Doris laughs and then says, "Yes. I remember. Thank you, Betty, for playing one of my favorite old hymns. I don't get to hear them too much nowadays."

"I must go, Grandmother. I'll see you in a little while."

Helen has just arrived for her morning shift at the nursing home. She is stopped at the first floor station by the night nurse. Bonnie says, "Helen, we have a problem."

"What's that, Bonnie?"

Doris' niece, Betty, was involved in a car accident last evening and was killed. Doris' daughter just called and she will be here soon to tell her mother. I just wanted you to know since you'll need to get Doris up in a little while."

"That's terrible, Bonnie. Betty was such a beautiful young lady; it just doesn't make any sense. Doris will be heartbroken."

Bonnie replies, "I know. It is so sad. Doris is so sweet and kind. Things like this shouldn't happen to people like her."

Albert and Betty are embracing at the gorge. Albert says, "I am surprised to see you, my child. You had so many years of service in the world. You will be missed in the battle."

Betty says, "I thought so also, but Jesus told me that sometimes our death brings life to so many others. He showed me what the future brings and I am thrilled about my witness and content with my life.

Albert says, "Well, I am thrilled that you are here in heaven with me. Would you like to play a duet for Jesus and your grandmother?"

"I would like that myself". They are interrupted by Jesus. He is sitting on the large rock with Blasdon.

Betty asks, "What would you like for us to play, Lord?"

Jesus replies, "You pick one for me, Betty."

"I believe I know one you will like, Lord."

Albert asks, "Lord, I know you have your plan and I shouldn't question your decisions, but why is Doris not here with us? Can she still be of use to you?"

"Oh, yes, my son. Doris is very important in spreading our love in the world. She proclaims the gospel in a very unique way. She will help turn many to the right road in their final stages of life. She does what she does so well. Besides... you know how unhappy she would be if she left without finishing those booties for that new baby."

Albert laughs and then he says, "You're right, Jesus... she would be mad." As he takes up his violin, he remarks, "I hope you like the hymn that Betty has chosen for you, Lord."

Jesus replies, "I always have."

*Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See on the portals he's waiting and watching
Watching for you and for me.*

*Come home, come home
Ye who are weary come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, Oh sinner, come home!*

Will L. Thompson, 1880

Dedicated to all those talented ministers and lay people who proclaim the love of God in their music and preaching; especially, those lay people who accept no salary for leading in their church. Alvin Tully is still singing and playing his violin in heaven for the master he served so faithfully in this life. His witness continues through his family and the many souls he touched with his words and music.

*I know your deeds,
your love and faith,
your service and perseverance,
and that you are now
doing more than you did at first.
Revelation 2:19*

Risen Love

Visit 62 - An Easter Story

Jorge's song

*Love descended from heaven's throne,
Risen Love, you prepared our home.
Risen Love, how can this be?
How can you love dirt like me?*

Heaven is waiting; waiting for the arrival of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Today is a special day, a celebration day, a day of remembrance, and a day of joy. This is the festival of Easter.

Today is even more special than the Christmas celebration; remembering the day the Savior of the world was born. Easter is the celebration of the Son's return to his rightful place, at the right hand of God the Father. It is a festival for all souls to rejoice and to remember the day of Christ's defeat of death, his resurrection from the grave.

Each town in heaven has been planning for this important day for a long time. Jesus will come to each heavenly town and a huge feast will be held in his honor. Hymns of praise will be sung and gifts of the heart will be presented to the Risen Son.

One of the things necessary for the occasion was that a sufficient supply of flowers be available. The flowers are strewn before Jesus as he makes his way into the town. Every variety of flower is collected in bunches and placed at numerous points in containers along the road leading to the town's gate.

"Wanda, don't we have enough flowers? I'm tired", Mark asks.

Wanda has placed some daisies and daffodils with the other flowers a little distance from where Mark is working. She replies, "Not yet, Mark. We need to have enough to cover the road for Jesus to walk."

"Yeah, brother... don't be such a wimp", Martin chides.

"A Wimp?! What do you mean... wimp? I've been here all morning working and now that we're about finished, you show up. You're the wimp, not me."

Martin replies, "I've been working in town decorating. I finished that job. I just came to help Wanda.

"You two....," Wanda says. "You act just like brothers. Let's hurry and finish."

Martin laughs and then says, “Okay, Wanda. We’re just fooling around. Here, Mark, grab this basket and I’ll get this other one. We’ll go a ways closer to town. We’ll have this finished in no time.”

Martin is right; the job doesn’t take too long and the three friends stand under the shade of an oak tree admiring their work. A young lady who appears more than a little nervous interrupts them.

“Wanda, boys, have you seen Jorge? It’s almost time for Jesus to arrive and we don’t have the special song.” Yvonne plays the piano and directs the town choir. “We do need to practice it before the presentation.”

“I haven’t seen him this morning, Miz Yvonne”, Wanda replies. “How about you guys?”

“We had breakfast together”, Mark responds. “He said he was going to the spring on the mountain top over there.” Mark points to a high mountain close to town. A river of living water flows from a spring near the top and through the surrounding towns to provide nourishment. “He said he needed inspiration to complete the special song.”

Wanda exclaims, “Water! I forgot the water! Will you guys get buckets of water to fill the flower containers so they won’t wilt? I’ll go find Jorge. I know where he is, we’ve been there a number of times.”

*Risen Love, rising sun,
Unfailing love of Father and Son;
Risen Son, chase away the night
And remove the cataracts of sight.*

Wanda stands next to the flowing water at the bottom of the tall mountain. She looks up to the top and in an instant she finds herself standing on the summit. She knows Jorge’s favorite spot and hurries up the path between the tall spruce and pine trees.

Her search is rewarded as she comes to a large rock overlooking the surrounding towns in the valley. Jorge is sitting on the rock strumming his guitar and singing.

“Jorge!” she calls. As he turns and smiles, she says, “Your song is needed, Jorge. Yvonne needs the song so the choir can practice before Jesus comes. There isn’t much time.”

“Haven’t you heard, Wanda?” Jorge replies. “Time doesn’t exist here in heaven. We say the word, but it doesn’t exist. It doesn’t matter how long I take or how bad I mess up, Jesus will work it all out, he’ll make it right... just like he always has.”

“Jorge, don’t go there. We’ve talked about this in the world and even here in heaven. Not one of us is here because we deserve it. We sinned and fell short of God’s holiness too. It’s only because of what Jesus did that any of us walked past death and

now walk with God. Because of the choice you made, nothing can separate you from the love of God... not even you.”

“You’re right, Wanda. I know we’ve talked about it and you’re right. I am my worse enemy. I have always pushed God away... he keeps pulling me back and I do it all over again.”

“Well, it’s time you ran to him instead of him coming to you. It might make a difference.”

Jorge looks at Wanda for a moment as her words sink in. He smiles and then says, “You know... that might be it.” Jorge jumps to his feet and embraces Wanda. “Let’s go, Wanda! We have to meet Jesus!”

In an instant they are standing in the town square. Jorge sees Yvonne and runs to her to give her the song sheet. Yvonne turns to the assembled choir and they begin to sing.

*His Love flowed from heaven above;
His Love sprinkled down on dusty souls;
We stumbled and fell, Love kissed hurt knees;
He opened blind eyes so we might see.*

*Love was tried and tested with hate;
He bore the whip for all our sake.
Love’s halo became a thorny crown;
He stumbled from a hateful town.*

*He struggled under the cross and fell,
Love climbed that hill on his way to hell.
My nails pierced his hands and feet,
Love was sacrificed for death’s defeat.*

*His heart lay stilled for those three days;
Then it was time for death to pay.
As angels shout, soldiers lay like dead;
A loving Son arose from his bed.*

*Risen Love, your all you gave;
You took my place in a stony grave.
Risen Love, a completed plan;
To bring us together in heaven to stand.*

*Risen Love, how can it be?
How can you love dirt like me?*

The prince of peace is coming! Jesus is coming down the road on a beautiful white horse. He is wearing the crown of his glory and his pure white linen robes are as brilliant as the sun. Love is coming!

The townspeople gather beside the road. They throw the flowers before Jesus as he rides toward the gate. You can feel the electricity of his presence as he rides past. Your heart leaps inside your chest at the very mention of his name, at the very sight of his face. The spirit in your soul unites with the Creator, the Sacrificial Lamb, the Risen Sun. Hosanna! Hosanna! The King has come! Holy, holy, holy, the Lord has come!

Jesus reaches the town square and he descends from his mighty horse. Throngs of his loving subjects press against him, just to touch him, to feel his love as his gaze falls upon them, to hear him call their name.

Jesus turns at a familiar touch. He looks into the eyes of adoration. His heart speaks as only he can:

*Forgiven one, your sin has gone,
I remember not one single wrong.
My blood has cleansed your sinful heart,
No more will we live apart.*

*Come here, my child, into my arms,
Rest safely here from all alarms.*

Jorge replies as two hearts are one, "I know, Jesus. I finally know that I belong to you. You will never have to look for me again. I'll be right here with you for eternity."

Jesus says, "That's right, my son. Now you realize the true meaning of Easter. That was the whole purpose of our plan; that we can be together... forever."

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a
life of love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:1*

To Matt, who never thought himself worthy of God's sacrifice and love; a happy Easter.

The Young Helper

Visit Sixty-three A Mother's Day story

Bob Watson was finishing up some purchase orders; it was a slow Saturday afternoon even though it was the day before Mother's day. Bob was working in the back office of his card and gift shop. He hoped to finish up the day in about an hour, close the store and head for home. Sales had been brisk until about thirty minutes ago and he assumes everyone has finished shopping for the big day tomorrow.

He thought to himself, 'A lot to do about nothing'. That thought was hypocritical as Mother's Day sales are second only to Christmas in volume. That nothing put a lot of money in his pockets.

"Bob, would you mind if I take off?" Bob's thoughts are interrupted by Maxine, his employee, and right hand. "I need to pick up a thing or two for tomorrow."

"It looks like our sales day is over. Sure, take on off, Maxine. I'll watch the front for the last hour."

"Have a good weekend, Bob. Be sure to get something for your wife. You know the boys won't remember. See you Monday."

"Thanks for the reminder, Maxine," Bob replied. "Have a great Mother's day."

He watches Maxine as she grabs her purse and leaves the store. Bob returns to his paperwork with one eye on the front of the store. He finishes the purchase orders and has just completed putting them in envelopes to his suppliers.

"Mister, can you help me?"

Bob almost jumps out of his chair. "Where did you come from, son? You nearly gave me a heart attack." The boy appears to be about twelve years of age, maybe a little more.

"I'm sorry, mister. I was just picking up a card for Mother's day and I couldn't find a cashier to buy this."

"Oh... you're right... I'll check you out. I didn't realize anyone was in the store."

As they walk to the front of the store, the young man says, "You have it great, mister. You have all the cards and gifts in the world for your mother. She's very lucky."

Bob hesitates and then replies, "I haven't seen my mother in a number of years. We had a little disagreement and.... you know... Well, I guess you don't know. I just haven't wanted to see her since."

“What’d she do, mister... It must have been really bad.”

“Well...” Bob thinks a moment and then says, “Not really... I might have been a little at fault... Things get blown out of proportion and time goes by and... What am I doing? I shouldn’t bore you, son, with my sad story.”

“That’s okay, mister. If it weren’t much, then why don’t you go by and see her and make up? That’s what I’d do.”

“I don’t know... Oh, that’ll be two dollars and twenty-four cents.” He takes the money from the young man and places it in the register. He places the card in a sack and hands it to the young man.

“You really ought to forgive your mom... She might die or something and you’d have a hard time forgiving yourself if you don’t.”

“How old are you, son? You are very mature for your age.”

“Just think about it, mister. Have a great day.”

“I’ll do that, son. Thanks...thanks very much.”

Maude is working in her flower garden. She loves the springtime when the flowers are just beginning to bloom and everything is so new and fresh. It rained last night, but the sun is shining brightly today.

“Well, that about does it,” Maude says as she examines her handiwork. “Those petunias are just the right touch. She smiles as she remembers an earlier time. Johnny would say, “You did good, girlfriend... real good.” Johnny has been in heaven for ten years, but she still thinks of him often. They had such happy times together.

“Oh, Johnny, tomorrow is Mother’s day. I wish Bob would come by. I’d hoped as time went by that he would forgive me...” She sees a young boy coming down the street. He turns and walks down the driveway to where she is working next to her house.

He walks up to her and says, “Ma’m, I’ve come to help you.”

This boy looks familiar. Must be from church. That reminds her, “Oh, yes, the filter... I forgot I put in a request for you boys to help me. It’s by the pool in the backyard. It’s very heavy and I just couldn’t move it. You would think the repairman would have moved it to the curb for me. Follow me.”

They go toward the back of the house and come to a swimming pool. Maude says as she pushes on the large metal pool filter, “I put on my request that this thing was very heavy. It’s full of sand and it weighs a ton. It’ll take more than you to move it to the front. You tell Charlie that we need a bunch of you guys to get this done.”

“I’m pretty strong, Ma’m. I think I hear your door bell ringing.”

Maude listens and replies, “I’m not sure... These old ears don’t hear as well as they did. I’ll go check.” Maude goes inside her house and hears the gentle ring of the front door bell. She calls, “I’m coming.”

She peeks outside through the window and exclaims, “Oh, Bob!” She excitedly flings open the door and says, “Bob! Bob, it’s so good to see you!”

“Well... I just stopped by to see how you’re doing...”

“I’m doing fine now. Can you come in for a little while?” She says as she opens the door.

“Maybe for a few minutes... I’m on my way home from the store.”

They are standing in the living room and Maude asks, “How is the store? Are the sales holding up this year? How is Caroline... the boys?”

“Everything is fine... everyone is good... Mom, would you come for lunch tomorrow after church? I spoke with Caroline and she would love to have you. The boys miss seeing you too... I miss you...”

“Oh, Bob...” Tears come to Maude’s eyes. “You don’t know how much I miss you too. I’m so sorry for what I did...”

“Don’t be, Mom... I’m at fault too. The things I said... I didn’t mean them... Please forgive me.”

“Oh, we were such fools... We let things get out of hand. I’m sorry for the lost time.” Maude and Bob embrace and the healing tears flow down happy cheeks.

The doorbell rings. Maude says, “Just a second, Bob... I’ll see who that is.” She opens the door and says, “Charlie, good to see you.”

Charlie is standing with three of his huskiest boys on her front porch. He replies, “We’ve come to move that filter, but I see we’re a little late. I guess I should have called earlier to let you know we were coming today.”

Maude looks toward where Charlie is pointing and sees the heavy filter lying next to the curb. She says, “Well, I’ll be... That young man from church was pretty strong. I didn’t think he could do it...”

Charlie asks, “What young man? I didn’t send anyone... We’re it.”

“I’m sorry that you went to so much trouble, Charlie. There was this young man that stopped by and I thought you sent him. I guess he moved that old thing by himself.”

Well, I'd like to meet him. We checked that thing and it would take all of us to move it. He'd be great in weightlifting. See ya, Maude. See you at church."

"Bye, Charlie. Thanks for being there for me. I'm sure I'll have other problems needin' fixing."

After Maude closed the front door, Bob remarks, "There was a young man that was in the store. He helped me think about us and how silly we were being. I sure would like to thank him."

"It sounds as if God sent his help to both of us. It appears we both were visited."

Bob thinks a moment and nods. He says, "It sure does... You know what, Mom? Caroline, the boys and I will see you in church tomorrow... In fact, how about us stopping by and pickin' you up in the morning?"

Maude is astounded. She finally says, "You bet... That would be wonderful."

Bob says, "I've got to get home, Mom. We'll see you tomorrow morning bright and early."

After Bob leaves, Maude is so overcome with emotional joy that she sits down in the rocker in the living room, puts her hands over her eyes and the tears flow once again. She says, "Thank you, God... Thank you for answering prayer. Thank you for getting us together again."

After she composes herself, she decides she needs to finish up her gardening. As she is about to rise, she notices an envelope on the table beside the chair. "Oh... what's this?"

She takes the Mother's day card out of the envelope and exclaims, "How sweet... Bob left me a card..." She opens the card and continues, "That boy... He forgot to sign it."

The Spirit of God is watching from the corridor between here and there. He says, "You did really well, Johnny."

Johnny says, "Thank you, Lord, for letting me help you."

***Her children arise and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her:
"Many women do noble things,***

But you surpass them all.”
Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
But a woman who fears the lord is to be praised.
Proverbs 31: 28 – 30 NIV

Despise not thy mother when she is old.
Proverbs 23:22

Healing Blessing

Visit Sixty-four A Father's Day Story

The nightmares had returned soon after Hunter, Gary's son, died in a tragic car accident a month ago. He hasn't told his wife of twenty-two years, Maria, as he doesn't want to concern her during this time of grieving. Somehow, she knows, as wives tend to do. That extra intuition that God gave women let her know that something is wrong with her man. She is a little more attentive than usual as she stays as close as possible in case she is needed. Maria hasn't said anything, but she knows and Gary knows she knows.

The dream itself is far from silly, but the reason for it is. It all started when he was a child and it was all because of his disobedience; he overheard something not intended for his young ears.

The news of the death of Gary's father had come to the little family when two army officers from a local unit visited them one day. Gary's dad had served honorably in Vietnam and he gave his life for his beliefs. The funeral was very moving and Gary's mother received a nice flag. The condolences and tears of family and friends helped so much during that time of grief. As the only child, Gary received a lot of attention and love.

About two months later, a young army soldier came by the house on the way home from the service. He had served with Carl, Gary's father, and was with him at the time of his death.

His mother asked Gary to go out in the backyard and play. The soldier gave Gary his military dress hat to wear. Gary knew that something was about to be discussed that his mother thought inappropriate for him to hear.

Instead of staying in the backyard as told, Gary ran to the side of the house and climbed over the wooden fence. He silently made his way past the bushes in the front flowerbed and got to the front room window where his mother and the soldier were talking. It was during the summer and the window was open to trap the cool north breezes. He pressed his back against the wall so as not to be seen.

He heard the young soldier relating a fateful mission; "We were on patrol west of our compound... we had been out most of the day. We were making a sweep... huh... searching for the enemy."

"We had been pretty successful that day and had routed out a number of VC... Viet Cong. We were headed home... we needed to get back before dark... and came to the village nearest our compound. Quanang was considered a friendly village. We provided good protection from the VC... we visited them many, many times a day and supplied food and medical supplies. We also supplied their men with weapons and training so they could withstand the VC's."

“Carl was very friendly with the village kids and they knew he would give them candy. I told him not to be so friendly... it wasn't safe... but he was pigheaded and didn't listen. Anytime he came, the dirty, little beggars would flock to him looking for a handout.”

“Thinking back, I can see that something was different that day... the kids didn't swarm around us... In fact, the silence should have been noticed, but we were feeling good and were over-confident. Carl and I were out front... leading the way into the village.”

“There was this young girl, however, and I noticed that she was walking toward us from where she had been standing next to a hut. I recognized her from our previous visits to the village. It is difficult to determine age, but I guess she was about seven or eight years old... maybe nine. I knew she had a younger brother and he was usually right next to her, following her wherever she went... but... not that day.”

“She was just walking very slow and deliberate toward where we were standing. She had her eyes riveted to Carl's. She didn't have that familiar smile I remember whenever we came to visit. I didn't like it.”

“I don't know how, but Carl sensed something wrong. The girl wasn't more than three or four feet away when Carl yelled ‘watch out!’ He turned and threw himself in front of me just as the grenade hidden in the girl's dress exploded. The flash was blinding and the concussion knocked us both to the ground with Carl on top of me.”

“The next thing I remember is a hospital bed near Danang. I had a slight head wound from shrapnel ripping through my helmet and grazing my scalp. Carl had saved my life as he took the blast in his back while shielding me.”

The soldier said more, but Gary didn't hear a word he said. His young mind was filled with images of the deadly war scene just described. He pictured the young girl walking toward his father and she suddenly exploded into a million pieces and Gary's father was dead. He hated that girl with death as her companion.

That's when the dreams started and they continued for a year or more. They stopped for some reason, but they had returned now. Hunter's death had brought back the girl and her deadly mission. Hunter had always been critical of Gary's feelings of hatred toward the Vietnesse. He thought Gary should forgive those that had done him no wrong; especially those who weren't even born during that wartime. Hunter just didn't understand.

“Has that old nightmare come back?” Maria asks as Gary sits upright in bed.

“What makes you think that?” Gary asks.

“Oh, I don't know... it could be that the last three nights you have awakened me by suddenly jerking and springing up in bed. Is it as bad as when you were a child?”

“No... not really. The girl’s face is blurred. I don’t remember what she looks like now, not that I ever did, but my dreams had a face before. I know it’s because Hunter is gone that these dreams have returned... I wish he were here. I miss him so. I would even welcome him getting on my case about those vietemese people.”

Maria says as her tears come, “I do too, Gary. I do too.”

Then the mother and father hold each other and cry for the loss of their son. They do that a lot.

Gary says as he wipes the tears from his eyes, “The dream is a little different now... I believe I’m wrestling with someone... I can’t see his face... you know how dreams are, but it’s sort of like... you’ll think I weird, but it’s like Jacob weaseling with God... in the Bible... I guess I want a blessing too. I’m not too happy with God right now because of taking Hunter and not understanding why and all. Anyway, then this little girl starts walking toward me in the dream, but her face is blurred... then I wake up as she comes up to me. Weird isn’t it?”

Maria says, “It’s natural to be angry, but Hunter is in a much better place...”

“I know he is and I have that assurance, but I still miss him... very much.”

Maria says, “Me too...” And the tears start all over again.

Maria asks after a short while, “Don’t you need to go to the bank and close out Hunter’s checking account.”

Gary replies, “Yes... I’ve been putting it off. It seems so final and I haven’t wanted to deal with it. I’ll go tomorrow.”

Gary hated this chore. He didn’t want to go to the bank; not just because of closing Hunter’s account. He didn’t like the neighborhood in which the bank was located.

He walked into the lobby and looked for a free teller. After waiting in line for a short time, he arrived at the window. He says, “I’ve come to close my son’s account. Here is my driver’s license; I’m also on his account. Here’s a death certificate also. He passed away a few months ago.”

“I’m sorry for your loss, sir. If you’ll take a seat over there I’ll bring you a check for the balance in your son’s account in a few minutes.”

He took a seat in a chair across from a young Vietnamese couple. He nodded and they smiled back at him. He thought, 'There's a lot of those people here'. It was like he was in a bank in the middle of Saigon.

He was looking past the couple and it was then that he noticed her. She was across the lobby and she was walking slowly towards where he was sitting. She was about the right age and she was Vietnamese. She was looking straight at him as she came. He nervously looked for escape, but for some reason he couldn't move.

She walked right up to him. She had jet-black hair and dark brown eyes and the sweetest smile he had ever seen. Gary relaxed a little, but he still had vague thoughts of grenades exploding and...

The little girl said, "Hi... My name is Kari... What's your name?"

Gary was taken back, but he responded, "My name is Gary."

"I'm glad to meet you."

He is completely relaxed. He says, "I'm glad to meet you."

"My mother's name is Sarah. My brother's name is Andrew... My daddy's name is daddy."

Gary was amused at Kari's account of her family. He couldn't remember why he was so afraid of this little girl of her dreams. He says, "You have a nice family, Kari."

"Excuse me, sir... Here is the check." It was the teller.

"Thank you." To Kari, he says, "I've got to go now, Kari. I've enjoyed talking with you. You don't know how much it means to me."

"I enjoyed it also. Bye now."

Gary got up from his chair and walked toward the door. It hit him then and he turned around and looked for the little girl. He didn't see her near the chair he had vacated. He walked over to the area, but she wasn't to be seen. The young Vietnamese couple had finished their banking business and was going out the door. The little girl didn't belong to them. He scoured the bank, but he couldn't find her. Where had she gone?

A grandson and grandfather are watching from the corridor between here and there. Hunter asks, "Do you think that helped Dad?"

Cary replies, "I believe it did. He shouldn't feel the same as before. He knows he received a visit... and a... blessing."

They both smile at Jesus standing next to them.

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

Then the man said, "Let me go for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Then the man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?"

Then he blessed him there.

Genesis 32:24, 26-29 NIV

Special thanks to Brother Al's for his sermon about Jacob's wrestling match and to the Holy Spirit for sending Kari that day in the bank. Like Gary, I almost missed the blessing.

The Angel Pin

Visit Sixty-five A Christmas Story

It is two days before Christmas and the mall is very crowded. Craig is standing at the department store counter looking at different brands of perfumes. He wants to give his aunt something special for Christmas. Aunt Connie and Craig have been very close since Molly, Craig's wife, passed away two years ago.

He and Molly had been married for five years and her death left a big hole in his heart. Aunt Connie helped him over some very difficult times and still does. Christmas hasn't been too 'merry' for Craig the last two years. Molly always loved this time.

Aunt Connie suggested recently that Craig start dating again and he had tried to get back into the game, but it was not the same. He did have a couple of dates, but neither one held a promise of permanence. Craig guessed it would take a little time to find the right girl; if that was possible after Molly.

"I believe she would like this," he says to himself as he picks up a gift set of perfume. After paying for his purchase, he turns and is blinded-sided by a pretty young woman who also was not watching where she was going. She bounces off him and sprawls on the floor, her packages strewn across the floor.

"Oh!" Craig exclaims. "I'm very sorry." He reaches down to help her to her feet.

"It was my fault," She says. "I should have been watching and not be distracted. Thank you."

"Well, you weren't expecting a truck to move into your path as I did. My name is Craig. Let me get those for you."

"Thank you again." She holds out her hand. "My name's Susan."

"Now that we've been introduced, will you have lunch with me?" He likes this girl. "After all, I did knock up down. Let me make it up to you.

"That's not necessary, but if we go Dutch, then... okay. Sounds good."

They find a restaurant that is not too busy and are seated at a table. As they wait for the waiter to come they enjoy a pleasant conversation. Craig even entertains the thought that Susan might be the one. She is a single girl and she certainly is easy to talk to and they have a lot of the same interests. She seems to be having a good time also.

"I like your angel pin," Craig says. "My... a friend of mine made something similar." Molly had a hobby of jewelry making when she was alive. He didn't want to bring up Molly and her death at this time. "It's very pretty."

“Thank you... Oh excuse me... my phone.” She retrieves her cell phone and answers the ring, “Hello... yes... Oh! I’ll be right there. Thank you.”

To Craig, she says, “I’ve got to go... There’s an emergency. I’m sorry. I enjoyed our visit.”

“Let me take you,” Craig offered.

“No... I can handle it. I am sorry... I must go.”

Craig watches Susan exit hurriedly and disappear into the crowd. It is then that he realizes, “I didn’t get her last name or address or phone or anything. What a dunce! Here I meet someone special and I let her get away and no way to contact her. Dumb...dumb...dumb.”

He goes ahead and buys a hamburger and fries for lunch. When he finishes, he goes to the cashier to pay his bill. The bus boy catches up with him. He says, “I found this pin beside your table. Is it yours?”

It is an angel pin like Susan was wearing. “Yes... it belongs to my friend. I don’t know where she lives, but maybe I can locate her. Thank you very much.”

The bus boy says, “There’s a name of a company on the back. Maybe they can help.”

“Say... that’s a great idea. Thanks... Here... this is for your help.” He offers the young man a ten dollar bill.”

“That’s not necessary, sir. You have a Merry Christmas.” The young man walks away.

Craig calls after him, “You have a Merry Christmas too. Thanks again.”

‘This looks like the right address.’ Craig thinks as he parks beside a shop on Dearing Street. ‘Oh yes, there’s the name of the company... J & M Designs. Well, here goes.’

As Craig enters the little shop, a little bell announces his arrival. He finds a small waiting area and a service counter. In a few seconds, a young lady with long brown hair comes to the counter and asks, “May I help you, sir?” She has a slight French accent.

“I hope you can... I have this pin with your name on the back. Do you keep records of who purchases your designs? All I have is a first name of ‘Susan’.”

“Yes we do... Let me see it... Oh yes, this is one of our designs. I’ll check our books... Excuse me.”

The young lady appears again from the back with a piece of paper in her hand. She says, “We have three ‘Susans’ who purchased this particular design. You may be able to locate the one you seek from these.”

“Thank you.” Craig says, “Are you the ‘J’ or the ‘M’ of your company? You do great work.”

“Thank you, sir. No... The creators are at another location. This is only a sales outlet.”

“Thanks again... What do I owe you for your help?”

“There’s no charge, sir. Have a Merry Christmas.”

It is late afternoon as Craig arrives at the first address supplied. This is the home of Susan Baker. It is a neat little house in the suburbs. He rings the doorbell and a lady opens the door. She is not **his** Susan.

Before he can say anything, she says, “I’m so glad you came... Just a second. I have him ready to go.”

True to her word, she is back carrying a young boy. She says, “Take us to the hospital. He fell...He’s unconscious... Hurry!”

Craig stammers as they run toward his car, “Sure, lady, but what about 911? Did you call emergency?”

“I did... the first ambulance had an accident. They’ve dispatched another one, but it will be too late. You’re it. Now get going... PLEASE!”

Craig hits the accelerator as he says, “Yes ma’am... I’m going.”

He is waiting in the emergency waiting room. Susan Baker comes from the back with the doctor. She completes her discussion with the doctor and comes to where Craig is standing.

Craig asks, “How’s he doing?”

“He’s going to be alright. They are keeping him overnight for observation. I want to thank you for your help. You saved his life... the doctor said that we made it just in time. You are a special angel.”

“Angel? No ma’am... I’m just an ordinary guy.”

“Well, whatever you think you are... you’re an angel to me. When they called about the wreck, I prayed for God’s help and you showed up... You may not know it, but you’re an answer to my prayer.” She gives Craig a kiss on his cheek.

Susan’s husband arrives at the hospital a few minutes later and also thanks Craig for being there to transport his family. He asks, “Can I pay you for your time and trouble?”

Craig replies, “Oh course not... I’m glad I could help. I hope you and your family have a Merry Christmas.”

The next day is Christmas Eve and Craig takes Aunt Connie to breakfast and gives her the perfume. He receives a nice blue tie in return. After taking her home, he pulls out the ‘Susan’ list once again. It’s about eleven o’clock when he arrives at Susan Morris’ home on Abbott Street.

An older lady answers the door. She says, “I’m glad you finally made it. Come in.”

Once inside he finds two other ladies. Susan Morris continues, “Here. Get in here and put this on. The children are waiting.” She ignores Craig’s protests and shoves a box into his hands and pushes him into a bath room located next to the living room.

When he opens the box, he finds a Santa Claus suit. Not wanting to argue again with the pushy Susan lady, he puts the suit on, complete with false hair and beard. When he comes out of the bathroom, the three ladies give him a sack he assumes is full of toys and pushes him again down the hall.

One of the other ladies says, “Don’t let the children shock you.” He wonders about this warning until he enters a large room that resembles a hospital ward. Beds line the walls and he estimates that there are twenty-five beds filling the room. Each bed has a severely deformed or mentally challenged child that is screaming at the top of their lungs, “Santa Claus!”

Craig goes from bed to bed and gives each child a present from the sack. He wishes each one a “Merry Christmas” and tells them goodbye.

Outside the room and down the hall, he breathes a sigh of relief. He says, “That was hard... really hard. I wish you had told me the condition of the children.”

The Susan lady says, “I assumed the church told you.”

Craig replies, “What church? What are you talking about?”

“The church that sponsors us. These children have been abandoned or their parents are unable to care for them. We get some funds from the State, but most of our help is from the church. I called them and asked for someone to come play Santa Claus for us. Aren’t you the one?”

Before he can answer, one of the other ladies comes from the den area and says, “The church just called, Susan. They said that the man was a little late, but he could be here in thirty minutes. I told him that God sent someone else.”

Susan says, “That is so true. Son, you are an angel.”

Craig replies, “Not really, but I’m glad I could help.”

“What did you come to see us about?”

“I’m looking for a woman named ‘Susan’ who belongs to this.” He shows her the pin. “I assume you don’t have another ‘Susan’ hiding somewhere so I can cross you off the list.”

“Well, I hope you find her, son. We also wish you a Merry Christmas. You don’t know how much you helped us. The children would have been extremely disappointed to miss the promised visit from Santa Claus.”

After eating lunch, Craig looks at his watch. It’s two o’clock in the afternoon. He checks the list and figures that there is only one ‘Susan’ left and she has to be the one. He arrives at Susan Renault’s house on Stewart Street at three o’clock.

As he starts to ascend the twelve steps to the door, an older lady comes out the front door and starts down the steps. Craig watches as she takes the first step, trips and starts to fall. He rushes up and catches her before she can hurt herself.

“Oh, thank you, young man. You saved me from a terrible fall. God must have sent you to save me from injury. You are indeed an angel.”

Craig replies, “No ma’am... I’m just me. I’m glad I could be here for you. Can you tell me if you know Susan Renault?”

“Why... that’s me. What do you want from me, son?”

“I’m looking for a girl named Susan and I was checking out names of Susans that had purchased a angel pin like this one. I was hoping I would find her.”

“I am sorry, young man. I have my pin right here on my blouse. I wish I could help.”

“Me too, Mrs. Renault. Me too. Merry Christmas, Ma’am.”

As Craig watches Mrs. Renault walk to the bus stop, he thinks, ‘Well, that about does it... I’m out of Susans to contact.’ He starts toward his car parked at the curb.

“Say, Mister... Over here.”

Craig looks in the direction of the voice and sees a little girl sitting on the porch of the house next door. He walks to the bottom of the steps. He replies, “Yes. Can I help you, young lady?” He notices she has a cast on her leg.

“Are you an angel? I heard Mrs. Renault.”

“No... I’m not an angel. I’ve been called one lately, but nothing could be further from the truth. I’m just a sinner saved by grace. Say! Is your name Susan?”

“No... Michelle. Why do you ask?”

“Well, I’ve been hunting all over for a Susan that belongs to this pin.” He walks up the steps and hands Michelle the angel pin.

She exclaims, “My pin! You found my pin. I thought it was impossible that I would find it again. Mother said that with God nothing’s impossible. Mister, you really are an angel.”

Craig throws up his hands and replies, “Well, I guess I am. What do you know about that. Well, I’m glad you got your pin back. I’m all out of Susans, and it’s all yours. I hope you have a Merry Christmas, Michelle.”

As he turns to leave, Michelle says, “My mother’s name is Susan.”

Craig turns back and says, “What did you say...” He stops as he sees **his** Susan standing in the doorway of the house. He calls, “Hello...Susan. I’ve been looking for you.”

“So I overheard... Michelle let me borrow her pin... I thought I had lost it at the park where she fell. She was riding her bicycle while I shopped at the mall. Her babysitter was with her and called me when the accident happened. You went to a lot of trouble to return a lost pin.”

“Well... that’s part of my job. Angels are supposed to return lost items. Everyone knows that. Besides, we didn’t get to eat our lunch. I was wondering if you would have dinner with me sometime... you know, after the holidays and all...”

“What about right now. I’m fixing dinner for us... Why not join us... unless you have other plans, of course. I don’t know angel schedules on Christmas Eve.”

“No... nothing planned... Us angels did our thing at the original Christmas, it’s all been done now. We’re pretty much free. However, I don’t want to impose on you and Michelle’s Christmas Eve dinner...and all.”

“You wouldn’t be imposing... What do you think, Michelle? Should we give this angel a good dinner for returning your pin? However, we might beat him a game or two at cards afterwards. That would be okay. What do you say?”

Michelle replies, “Sounds great to me... I need some fresh blood... I’m tired of beating you.”

Craig says, “What a great Christmas... This angel business isn’t bad at all.”

Not far away in the land where Christmas originated, Jesus and Molly are talking. Molly asks, “Did it work out as you planned, Jesus?”

Jesus replies, “Perfectly, my child. Your pin helped many people have a Merry Christmas, especially Craig.

Molly says, “Happy Birthday, Jesus.”

Jesus replies, “Merry Christmas, my child.”

Bus Ride to Heaven

Visit Sixty-six

“Hurry, Janet! We have to finish loading your luggage and get to the church in fifteen minutes.”

“I’m coming, Mom. But Bobby won’t let them leave without me. You know that.”

“Don’t be too sure, dear. They want to get on the road at five...”

“What’s the deal? Why do we have to leave at five in the morning? It’s obscene... it’s crazy.”

Janet’s mother is going out the kitchen door to the garage. She is loaded down with Janet’s sleeping bag and one of her traveling bags. She calls back over her shoulder, “Blame Ben... He wants to be at the youth camp by nine o’clock this morning. It’s about four hours travel time from here.”

Janet is coming downstairs with her cosmetic case. She says, “I know... And what’s bad I voted for it at Youth Council. It didn’t sound so terrible six months ago when Ben brought it up. Oh well, I’m going back to sleep after I get on the bus...that is, that’s the plan if the goofy boys leave us alone.”

Margaret says as she scoops up the lunch bag filled with her chocolate-chip cookies, “Is that what you really want... to be left alone by the boys? Here... take these cookies. If you really want to be left alone, use them as a distraction... works every time.”

“Oh, Mother...”

Meanwhile, on the other side of time, beyond our dreams, in the land of rainbows and un-imaginable joy, a man and woman are waiting to see Jesus. Jesus is talking with his angels and the couple is hesitant to interrupt. They are standing some distance from the group.

When he is finished, Jesus walks over to the couple to draw them into his loving arms. He says, “My children, Helen, Bruce, don’t concern yourselves. She is one of mine... you know that. It is not a punishment to come to heaven.”

“But she’s so young, Lord,” Helen says.

Jesus replies, “Eternity is eternity, Helen... It matters not the amount spent there... it’s not the quantity, but the quality that matters. She has influenced many there and by coming home, she will affect many more. You know a child of mine touches many lives and her witness is both active as well as passive. Good does come out of tragedy... someone may die, so that in dying others will live... really live. Your lives affected her and helped to change her destiny to be heaven, not hell. When she accepted our love and became a Child of God, her destiny was here with me... I prepared a place for her even at that very decisive moment, to be ready for her when it is time for her to return to me...to come to heaven.”

Jesus pauses a moment and then continues, “I have heard your prayers... I’ll see what may be done... I’ll speak with the Father.”

Bruce says, "We know your burden is heavy, Lord. You know the future and the consequences of present events and decisions. We know you love us and all you do is for the good of your children... the present as well as the future ones."

Jesus replies, "I must continue to search for my lost sheep and bring them back to the flock. Your granddaughter is helping me do that."

Janet and Margaret reach the church building at precisely five o'clock. There is so much activity they have difficulty getting Janet's bags to the loading spot next to the bus. Ben, the Youth Minister, has delegated four of the huskiest boys to place the luggage in the baggage bay of the bus. Everyone is hustling this way and that in the dark like busy ants trying to get situated on the bus.

Margaret has told Janet goodbye and Janet is about to get on the bus. Margaret hurries up to her and gives her a big embroidery pillow. She says, "Don't forget your grandmother's pillow she made for you. You'll have somewhere soft to lay your head."

Janet rolls her eyes and says, "Oh, Mom... this is so juvenile... Okay... sure, let me have it. I love you too. Bye, now."

Janet walks down the aisle looking for an open seat. She doesn't want to go to the back where the boys are as she is hoping to get a little more sleep. She spots an open aisle seat three rows back from the front of the bus. The other seat is occupied by Laura, a friend of Janet, who is in her youth class at church.

"Laura! Are you saving this seat for someone? May I sit with you?"

Laura looks up and replies, "Sure, Janet. No one is sitting here."

Janet starts to sit down, but she appeals to Laura, "Can I have the window seat, Laura? I want to go to sleep and I'll be more comfortable there leaning up against the window."

"No problem... I'll move over."

Janet gets settled and hands Laura the pillow. She says, "For letting me sit here, I'm giving you a prize. It's very soft and my grandmother made it for me...enjoy."

Laura says, "That's nice, Janet, but don't you want it? Well...thanks... that's really nice of you."

The bus finally got on the road at five-thirty, a little later than announced, but as planned for by Ben. Janet has been asleep for a while and Laura is just drifting off. The pillow certainly is soft and nice.

The bus reaches the interstate and picks up speed. The highway is not crowded at this early hour and they will gain time.

Laura wakes up a few minutes later and looks toward the front of the bus. She sees the bus driver out of his seat adjusting his rear-view mirror.

Suddenly, she feels the bus jerk to the right and she sees the driver frantically attempt to steer the bus back on the road. She hears a crunching sound and then the impact violently throws her forward. Now all is black and soundless.

As Janet wakes up, she finds that she is lying on a stretcher as a paramedic gently binds up her arm with some type of elastic bandage. She feels a neck brace restricting her movement and her knee hurts...a lot.

She moans and the paramedic smiles. He says, "Good... I'm glad you decided to wake from your sleep. How do you feel? Where does it hurt?"

"My knee is killing me. What happened to my arm... what happened?"

"The bus crashed into a concrete bridge support for some reason. Lie still and I'll give you something for the pain. It's going to be okay. You're very lucky... It could have been worse except this pillow absorbed most of the damage." He shows Janet a torn and dirty pillow.

Janet says, "Wait a minute... I gave that pillow to Laura... Where's Laura?"

The paramedic replies, "I don't know... Don't worry... I'm sure she's being cared for... There... That should take care of the pain... You'll sleep a little bit and we'll get you to the hospital to check you out better."

About a month later, Ben is playing basketball in the church gym with a few of the senior high guys. He notices Janet standing beside the court and he excuses himself from play and walks over to her.

"Hay, Janet! I heard they released you from the hospital today. How are you feeling?"

“I’ll have to wear this knee brace for a while and use these crutches, but I’m doing okay. I just feel so bad about the others... it was horrible... we lost so many good friends...”

“Yes, we did... We all have so many questions... I miss all of them too.”

Janet says, “I miss Laura... We weren’t best friends, but she was always there with a kind word to lift you up. She was one of those real Christians. She lived what she believed.” Janet hesitates for a second and then continues, “That’s something else, Ben. I want to be genuine like Laura. I want what she had. I know all the right words and I know I’m a sinner and I thought I had it right, but I don’t... I don’t have that relationship with God like Laura.”

Ben says, “Well, I know someone who can fix that... Jesus. Come on, Janet. Let’s go to my office and we’ll talk to the one that can fix anything. He wants you to be his child.”

Bruce and Helen are present when Laura enters heaven. After their reunion, they show her all of heaven’s beauty and riches.

Laura says in response to her grandmother’s question, “Something told me we were going to crash and... I guess, instinctively, I shoved Janet’s pillow over her for protection. That’s the last thing I remember.”

Bruce says, “Well, you saved her physical life by sacrificing yours, but you had a big part in saving Janet’s spiritual life as well. You should be very proud... we are.”

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Luke 19:10 NIV

Dedicated to those young people from Peace Church who thought they were going to camp this summer, but instead found their destination in heaven.

A Pleasant Afternoon

Visit Sixty-seven

Harry and Joan have just left the morning worship service at their church and they are driving toward a favorite restaurant for lunch. Harry's favorite football team is the second televised game today so they have plenty of time.

"Brother Al's sermon was really good today", Harry remarks.

"Yes, it was... But I felt he was preaching at me today", Joan says.

"Me too, but I have felt that way a number of Sundays lately", Harry says. He glances at Joan and sees her hand brush away a tear. "Don't cry, Honey... You know I can't stand it when you cry... I start to cry too."

"I'm sorry... It just hurts still."

"I know... I miss him too. It's been two years and I still hurt..." Harry asks, "Will we ever get past the grief and hurt?"

"There's no set time period for grief... It varies between people. It's just taking us longer than we want it to take."

I miss our talks about sports... baseball, football, basketball... It just left a hole in my heart when he died."

Joan says, "I miss our discussions on menus and cooking ideas. We had good times together. He was so encouraging when I was feeling down. It's hard not having him with us."

They stop for a red light. The motor starts to make a strange noise. Harry asks, "What's wrong now? That doesn't sound too good. I just had this thing serviced yesterday." Harry gets out of the car and opens the hood. He calls back to Joan as she leans out of the window, "It looks like the belt broke. I had a new belt put on six months ago... must have been defective."

"What are we going to do, Harry?" Joan asks.

"I've got the old belt, but I'm not certain I have my tools in the trunk."

"Excuse me... Can I be of assistance?" A young man has approached the car.

Harry looks at the young man and apparently the young man passes the older man's inspection. Harry says, "If you have any experience with cars then you certainly can. My name's Harry and this is my wife, Joan."

“Good to meet you... My name’s James. I’ve done a little work on cars... Let me take a look.”

It didn’t take James long to assess the situation. He found the old belt in the trunk and made short work of getting the car back in good running condition.

Harry was looking on and he asked, “How did you get that belt on without a wrench?”

“It’s an old trick I learned. It’s not too hard”, James replies.

“James, come eat lunch with us... It’s the least we can do in exchange for helping us with the car. The restaurant is right up this street.” Harry says as James shuts the car trunk.

“That sounds good, but you don’t have to buy me lunch... I didn’t do this for pay,” James replies.

Joan says, “We know, James. We would just like for you to have lunch with us. Where are you from?” She asks as James gets into the back seat of the car.

“Not very far from here”, James replies. “In fact, this town reminds me of where I live in a number of ways. The people here are very friendly.”

After they drive a little further down the street, they pull into a parking lot next to a restaurant. Harry asks, “Is this okay with you, James? This place has a variety of selections and I think you can find something you like. Of course, if you have another preference, let me know.”

“This will do just fine”, James replies as he opens the door for Joan to get out of the car.

They enter the restaurant and Harry remarks, “They are busier than usual because we were delayed. The church crowd has beat us. It’s a ‘seat yourself’ place and I see a free table over there next to the window. Let’s grab it.”

After they are seated and have had a chance to review the menu selections, James says, “If you will excuse me, I need to go wash my hands. Will you get me a water and a house salad with Ranch dressing?”

Joan says, “That’s not a very big meal, James. Don’t you need something more?”

“I’m not very hungry and besides, I like to fill up on their bread...”

Harry says, “That’s what our son, Bill, use to say...”

“I’ll be right back”, James says as he starts in the direction of the bathroom.

Harry remarks, "What a coincidence... I remember Bill saying that he would fill up on the bread and he wouldn't have to order too much."

Joan says, "Yes, I remember too. Bill didn't like to pay so much when we ate out. He thought we ate out too much anyway."

The waitress interrupts them, "Hello, my name is Bonny. I'll be your waitress today. Can I take your order... or do you need more time?"

Harry looks at Joan and then he replies to the waitress, "I think we're ready, Bonny... Joan, you order first."

Joan says, "I think I want the salmon. What's that glaze... honey Dijon?"

Bonny replies, "I think you'll like it... It's pretty new on the menu. It's equal parts of honey, Dijon mustard and lemon juice. It is delicious. What do you want with the salmon?"

"The broccoli sounds good with the cream sauce and a salad with Ranch dressing."

"The chef adds some rosemary in the sauce to give it a very good taste. What would you like to drink?"

"Just water", Joan replies.

Harry says as the waitress turns to him, "I'll take water also. I want the chicken-fried steak with a baked potato and salad with Thousand Island dressing. We need another water and a house salad with Ranch dressing for the gentlemen here."

Bonny asks, "Do you want rolls or cornbread or a mixture of both?"

Harry looks at Joan. He laughs and then he replies, "Just rolls... and plenty of them. Thanks, Bonny."

Bonny is back promptly with their drinks and a big basket of rolls. As she leaves, James returns to the table. He grabs a roll and breaks it open and spreads a generous helping of butter.

He asks, "You said something about your son... Bill, wasn't it?"

Joan replies, "Yes... Bill passed away suddenly in a car accident two years ago."

James says, "I am sorry... I know you must miss him very much. I shouldn't have mentioned it."

Harry says, "You couldn't know. It may sound funny to you... but even after two years, we have a difficult time... we miss him, you know."

“Not at all... I understand... It’s us that are left behind that are sad because we do miss our loved ones. Bill is probably playing touch football with Jesus in heaven right now and having a great time. It may seem like a long time, but you guys will get to see him again and share in the wonders of heaven and the love of God.”

“Wow!” Harry exclaims. “I was going to ask you about your relationship with Jesus, but I can tell that you know him personally. Thank you for your words of assurance.”

Joan says, “Yes, James, thank you so much... We know what you say is true, but it’s great to hear it from someone else.”

A waiter holding a tray of food interrupts them. He says, “I’m sorry for the delay. We are so busy today and we’re short of help. I have a salmon and a chicken-fried steak. Is this what you ordered?”

“Why, yes it is,” Harry replies. They don’t ask about Bonny, because it is common for one waiter to take an order and another to deliver it.

After placing the food on the table, the waiter asks, “I have this extra salad. It doesn’t go here, does it?”

“Yes... It does... right here.” Joan pats the area in front of James.

“Thank you... I’ll check back later to see if you need anything else.” The harried waiter hurries off to fill another order.

Harry asks James, “You mentioned football... Do you like sports?”

“I love sports... especially the one in season at the time. What do you think about the Cowboys? You never know how they will perform from week to week.”

“I agree... they are young and they seem to be getting better from week to week. They will still make mistakes, but hopefully, they will continue to improve.” Harry is having a great time.

“They have won a couple of games they weren’t supposed to win already, haven’t they?. Who knows how good they really are,” Joan says.

The three companions spent over an hour talking about various football teams. They even talked about various foods they each enjoyed. The waiter had cleared away the empty plates and refilled their water glasses a couple of times. The crowd was dwindling away and the waiter placed the bill on the table the last time he refilled the glasses.

James says, “I’ve enjoyed our visit, but I must be going.”

“We have enjoyed you also. Can’t you stay a while longer?” Joan asks.

“I wish I could, but I have to go.” James gets up from his chair.

Harry says, “Thank you for helping with the car and especially, just being with us and the sports talk. It’s been a very pleasant afternoon.”

“It has been good, hasn’t it... Goodbye, Harry, Joan. See you later.”

Harry and Joan watch James as he leaves the restaurant. They get up from the table and go to the cashier to pay their bill.

Harry says to the cashier as he looks at the bill, “There’s some mistake, Miss. There should be another salad on the bill and it shows only two at our table and there were three of us.”

The cashier says, “I’ll check with the waiter, sir. One moment please.” She motions to the waiter, “Tony, can you come here a moment.”

Tony asks, “Is there anything wrong?”

“You didn’t charge us for a salad for our friend.” Harry replies.

“There were only you two at the table. There wasn’t anyone else and I didn’t charge for the extra salad.”

Joan asks, “Where’s Bonny... She took the order from us.”

Tony looks at the cashier and then he says, “We don’t have anyone by the name of Bonny working here. There are just us three guys waiting tables. Sorry, but I only saw you two at your table.”

Harry and Joan look at each other. Harry says, “Thanks, Tony... I guess we are mistaken.” He pays the bill. They leave the restaurant and go to their car.

Joan says, “You know the scripture that says you may be entertaining angels?”

“I know it very well.” Harry replies. “I think we just did that very thing.”

In the nearby land where time doesn’t exist and love waits for us, Jesus is talking to two of his messengers. He says, “Well done, my faithful servants. My child, Bill, was concerned for his parents. You have helped to reassure Harry and Joan of their faith and the Father’s love.

Jimasyn says, “Bolieth and I are honored that you had confidence in our doing your work, Lord. Thank you for letting us help.”

*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people
have entertained angels without knowing it.
Hebrews 13:2 NIV*

A Special Welcome

Visit Sixty-eight

It is a beautiful December morning as Wanda and Mark walk down the deserted park road. The temperature is a pleasant fifty degrees and the sun is shining brightly.

Wanda remarks as she kicks little rocks in the road, "I love these crisp cool days... Don't you?"

Mark replies, "I always have... With all that we have been doing, I haven't had a chance to talk with you. You didn't always like these cool days, did you?"

"Not at all. Winter was a dreaded time of the year for me. I loved the hot summertime, but the cold air made it difficult to breathe."

"It's been quite a change for you, hasn't it," Mark says as a Forest Service pickup truck passes them on the way to the entrance office.

"Oh yes!" Wanda exclaims. "It's been wonderful. I...we prayed for a miracle to occur, a healing from the illness... and God blessed us with His answer. Don't you like the difference in me?"

Mark laughs and then replies, "You bet. You know me... I'm an active kind of guy, sports and stuff. Before, I didn't know how to relate to you. I wanted to ask you to play basketball and stuff like that, but I knew you couldn't. We've made up for lost time since the miracle."

Wanda punches Mark in the arm and then takes off running. She calls back over her shoulder, "Come on, Mark. I'll race you to the basketball courts... winner shoots first."

The race is close, but Wanda beats Mark to the courts. She grabs the basketball and walks to the free throw line. She says as she takes aim at the goal, "This is how Steve Nash would do it." The ball swishes through the net.

Mark remarks, "Lucky shot." He retrieves the ball and heads to the line to duplicate Wanda's shot. "Do you think they will come?"

Wanda looks toward a distant unseen place and replies, "He said they would and I've always trusted His word."

Mark says, "Yeah... me too."

Peter and Laura are packing the car for the annual trip to the lake. They have been going to the state park to spend the New Year celebration with their good friends, the Waylands, for over twenty years. It's a special tradition, a special time.

Peter asks, "Are you sure you want to go, Laura?"

Laura turns from placing a few Christmas wrapped presents in the trunk of the car. She says, "I believe it's what we need to do. She would want us to continue on with everything. She loved going to the park with the Waylands as much, if not more, than we do. It was special to her."

"I guess this is one of the hardest times of the year to get past. Christmas was hard but this trip will be worse and then other special times of the year will bring back good memories. Maybe time will heal...I sure miss her."

Laura says as they reach for each other, "I know... so do I." After one of a thousand good cries, she continues, "But I wouldn't want her to come back and be sick as she was before... she's well now and is waiting for us."

Peter says, "You're right, but I still miss her. Let's finish up and get started. The Waylands have been at the park a whole day without us. We've got some catching up to do."

Wanda and Mark have finished their basketball game and are standing beside a large cabin in the woods next to a ripple-free, crystal-clear lake. They are looking at a young married couple carrying boxes and luggage into the cabin.

Wanda says, "Carol and I had some really great times in and around this old cabin. She and Jordan make a great couple."

Mark asks, "What did you guys do here?"

"So much went on here that was good...it's almost too much to remember it all... We watched VCR movies, "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" was a favorite of ours; we could play every part in the show. We played, I don't know how many, video games. We loved a snowboarding game called SSX. We did a lot of walking... at least, for me it was a lot. We walked down by the bridge over there and I fell in the water once and Carol saved me. Believe me, that lake water is cold this time of the year."

Mark laughs and then says, "I can only imagine. What else did you do?"

"We both had a large collection of "Lego" and we could build huge complex buildings and stuff like that. We had "My Little Ponies" and always "Barbie" dolls had to be brought. We even enjoyed playing the nightly "Family Game" and working jigsaw puzzles and stuff like that with our parents. Yes... we had a lot of laughs. It was a very special time for us all...especially, for me."

Mark says, "Sounds great to me. It sounds a lot like my family and the great times we had. Just think of the reunion when we meet again in heaven. I can hardly wait."

"Jesus says it won't seem too long to us. I'm looking forward to that day also."

"Isn't that your folks coming now?!" Mark exclaims.

Peter says as he parks the car in the designated spot by the curb, "Well, here we are. We made good time getting here."

Laura says, "Yes. I'll take the Christmas box and the jackets first."

Before they can get out of the car, they see a small pink butterfly flutter against the front windshield in front of Laura. It appears to be trying to get inside to her. It flutters over the top of the car and is gone.

Laura and Peter look at each other and they burst into tears. Peter finally says, "That was a nice welcome. "You know... I don't remember ever seeing a butterfly with pink wings. In fact, I don't remember seeing any butterflies at this time of the year. I believe someone wanted to say hello."

Laura says through her tears, "I think so too. I'm glad we came."

"Me too," Peter says as he gets out of the car.

Mark and Wanda are watching from the shadow of a stand of hack berry trees. Mark says, "That was nice, Wanda... very nice."

"Jesus said it was okay. He said Mom needed to hear from me... to know it's okay."

Mark says, "I think she knows."

"Let's go home, Mark."

Valentine Cards – I Love You

Visit Sixty-nine



Rory and Chandler are swinging on the big play set in Rory's grandmother's back yard. Rory appears to be about five years old and his best friend, Chandler, is a little younger.

Chandler has dark brown eyes and matching hair that reaches down to her waist. Rory has blond hair and his blue eyes sparkle with the innocence of the very young. Whenever Chandler smiles, the sunlight appears to double in its intensity. If you see one of these friends, you will see the other.

Rory asks, "Do you want to go see if Michael can play?"

Chandler replies, "No, we can't. Michael is going camping today."

"Oh yes... I forgot. How about getting the playdough out and making stuff?"

"Sure... whatever you want to do," Chandler says. "We could go to the park and ride some."

Rory's grandmother calls from the back door, "Rory! Chandler! Come in the house. I've got some fresh baked cookies on the table."

The two children look at one another. Rory says, "I bet I can beat you inside."

"No, you can't!" Chandler says as she jumps out of the swing and starts toward the house. Rory is equally as fast and the two finish even at the door.

After much pushing and shoving, they squeeze themselves through the back door and into the kitchen. The fragrant cookie and apple pie smells can be enjoyed for many miles.

"Grandma, you've been cooking all morning. Why do we have so much sweets?" Rory asks as he looks at the table full of cookies and a fresh baked pie.

His grandmother replies, "Tomorrow after morning worship we are having a covered dish lunch. Everyone brings their specialty and I always bring some sort of dessert. Now you two get to the table and grab a couple of sugar cookies. I'll get you some milk to drink."

"Oh boy, you bet!" Chandler exclaims as she scrambles into a chair and grabs a cookie.

Grandmother continues, "And would you like to do some Valentine's Day cards for your friends? Remember tomorrow is also Valentine's Day."

"Yes, Grandma..." Rory replies. "Do you have any cards?"

"No... you and Chandler will have to make your own. I have some paper and crayons and you can even make envelopes too. I'll show you."

"Yea!!!" Exclaims Chandler. "Valentine Cards!!!"

Grandmother sets the two friends to work with paper, pencils and crayons to create beautiful works of art. She offers help whenever they run into problems. They are very pleased with the finished creations.

"What do we do now, Grandma?" Rory asks as he finishes placing his cards in the hand-made envelopes.

"You need to decide the friends you will give them to, put their names on the envelopes and deliver them."

"Okay... we can do that. How about it, Chandler?"

Chandler grins and starts working on putting names on her envelopes. They finish this part of the project and go outside with their cards.

Rory says, "I'm giving a card to Wanda."

"Me too," Chandler says.

They go to the second house down from grandmother's house and walk up the front porch steps. They place their cards inside the screen door and ring the doorbell. They run around the corner of the house and watch.

A young lady opens the door and says aloud, "Well, well, what's this... cards for me?" She opens each card and reads, "Happy Valentine's Day. I love you... signed, Rory. This one says 'Happy Valentine's Day. I love you... Chandler'. How sweet..." She says loudly, "Rory, Chandler, I love you both too!"

Rory and Chandler continue from house to house leaving their card messages for their friends. At each house, they leave the cards in the screen door, knock on the door and run to hide. At each house, their friends read the special cards and call out "Rory, Chandler, I love you too."

As he and Chandler are walking toward the Chapel, Rory says, "I've got one card left to give out."

Chandler says, "Me too."

They walk into the Chapel and Rory asks, "Where are we going to put it where he will see it?"

"I know," Chandler says. She walks to the alter and places her card on the wooden rail.

Rory leaves his card beside Chandler's and says, "We'd better hide. He'll be here soon."

The two friends scurry to hide behind the second pew. Rory peeks out around the edge of the pew as the front door of the Chapel opens. He ducks down as the Shepherd walks toward the alter for his evening prayer time.

He says, "What's this? Valentine cards?" He opens the envelopes and reads the messages inside. He calls out, "Rory, Chandler, come out. I know you're here. Come here, Children."

Rory and Chandler run into the loving arms of Jesus. He says, "You two make heaven all the more special. I love you too. Happy Valentine's Day!"

Heavenly Visits mail to: visits@wt.net

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A Returned Gift

Visit Seventy – A Christmas Story

This has been a difficult pregnancy for Carol. The morning sickness lasted longer and was more severe than any Carol had heard or read about. She was miserable for the first five and a half months. The last three months have been equally hard with numerous trips to the doctor and a decree last week from said doctor that Carol was to get plenty of bed rest. Her blood pressure was a concern. The Christmas holidays made it possible for Carol to stay home from her school teaching job and Brian has made her stay in bed most of the time.

“This will be over soon, Carol,” Brian says. “Michael is due next week and the doctor said he would induce labor before the new year. Are you feeling okay today?”

“I’m fine, Brian... Quit your worrying. I just want to have my baby and not be pregnant. It’s normal for women to feel this way at this point in the process. You guys don’t understand.”

Brian laughs and then says, “You may be right. We take a lot for granted.”

“Well, tomorrow is Christmas and we need to get Joey that Startrek action figure he asked for. I just haven’t felt like shopping much this year. If you hadn’t done most of it, I don’t what we would do.”

“Next year,” Brian says, “you will be going one hundred percent. You did do a lot of early Christmas shopping this year too when you felt better. Don’t forget that.”

“Yes, I know,” Carol answers. “But it just seems there is so much to do and I don’t have the time. I do know that I feel pretty good today... considering... and I am going to the mall and buy my son a present.” She gets out of bed and heads to the closet to pick out something special to wear. Brian gets up and grabs the previously discarded jeans and shirt from last night.

Almost on cue Joey comes bounding into the room and plows into the bed covers that they have vacated. He burrows under the blankets and quilts like a gopher and then pops up on the other side of the bed; his blond hair hanging down over his eyes. You can see his goofy grin however and Brian can’t resist laughing at the four-year-old’s antics.

Joey asks as he plops down on Carol’s pillow, “Mommy, can I go to the store? What are you goin’ after? Did you know Christmas is comin’ tomorrow? Can I go with you? Can we play basketball, Daddy?”

Brian replies, “Joey, calm down... Yes, we’ll play basketball in a little while. Mommy has to go to the store by herself this time... you can go with her another time. You remember Steve at church?” He continues as Joey nods his head, “Well, Steve is coming over to watch you this morning while I work on my sermon for Sunday. He will

probably play basketball with you and a lot of other cool stuff. I'll join you after I finish and you and I will take on Steve in basketball... Okay?"

"Okay, Daddy...we'll beat old Steve... won't we, Daddy?"

"We'll try really hard, but Steve is on the varsity team at Martin High School and he might be a little tough to beat."

"We can do it, Daddy. Don't you worry. I'm a really good shooter-guy... right Daddy?"

"You bet, Joey... You're a great shooter-guy. Let's go fix some breakfast while Mommy gets ready... How about it?"

Not far away in the space between the world and hell, in a spiritual land known as Armageddon, two mighty angels are in a heated battle. One is a light angel by the name of Blasdon, a guardian, and the other is a dark called Kirkten.

The angels slowly circle each other with swords drawn, their wings retracted, and close to their muscular bodies. Their eyes dart back and forth, searching for any opportunity, any opening to strike a fatal blow.

Kirkten slashes with his steel rapier and Blasdon deflects the blow with his sword. He thrusts his blade at Kirkten's exposed chest, but the dark angel quickly dodges the lethal attack.

"That was close, Guardian," Kirkten says as he wipes the perspiration from his face. "You do well... but you can't win... The shepherd's witness offends my Master and his power pulsates through my body." He brings his sword down hard toward the light angel. Blasdon turns aside the blow but is knocked to his knees.

Blasdon says as he wearily rises to his feet, "You can't hurt the shepherd, he is under my protection... the Lord has given me the power."

Kirkten raises his sword over his head as he replies, "Your power doesn't extend to the shepherd's family, Little angel. That is how we will affect the shepherd... because of what the humans call 'love', we will win this battle."

The dark angel senses victory. He brings his sword down as Blasdon defends. The swords' collision rings throughout the vast wasteland. Blasdon is knocked once again to his knees. Kirkten smiles as he raises his sword again, "Too bad, Weakling. You were a worthy opponent."

An eternity away, in the beautiful land called heaven, a young lady is tending God's flower garden. She sprinkles the flowers with living water from a copper-colored

bottle. The flowers immediately radiate with God's mercy and the stems grow to enormous heights to encompass the whole mansion of glory.

Laura picks a large bunch of daisies and roses. She enters the mansion and arranges the flowers in a crystal vase. Then she takes a few poinsettias and weaves a flower crown, which she places on her blond head. She weaves another wreath and places it on the table. She places a candle inside the small wreath.

Laura senses His presence and turns into his arms. She exclaims, "Lord... Jesus!" Her heart overflows with joy at the sight of her Lord.

Jesus says, "Laura, my child... Your service has made the mansion beautiful. Your love shares happiness and joy with all you meet. What is your earnest prayer at this Christmas celebration?"

"My prayer is that my brother shall continue with his work in your service, Lord; that nothing will keep him from doing your will; that your protection extends to all he loves."

"For your prayer to be answered, I need your assistance once again," Jesus says.

"How can I help, Lord?"

"Take the water you carry to my loyal guardian, who is in need of faith. The evil one has planted the seed of doubt and my angel is weakening. Will you help me?"

"Yes, Lord, send me."

Carol has been shopping at the mall for about an hour. She was successful in finding the prized treasure that Joey requested this Christmas. Also she picked out a blue sport coat for Brian and is about to pay for it at the cashier's stand. Her head has been hurting for about half an hour. She feels dizzy and the pain in her head becomes intense.

The cashier asks, "Ma'am...Ma'am! Are you alright?!" Carol faints, but is caught and gently lowered to the floor by a gentlemen standing behind her. The cashier excitedly calls to her assistant, "Beth! Call emergency! Hurry!"

Kirkten is about to thrust his sword into the helpless angel, as Blasdon doesn't have enough strength to lift his sword in defense. Suddenly, Laura appears between the two warriors and shields the weakened angel. She kneels in front of him.

Kirkten exclaims, "Why are you here, God's child?! Go! Return to your Home... or forfeit your life to me." He turns his blade toward Laura.

Laura ignores the dark angel as she places the edge of her cup containing God's living water to Blasdon's lips. The angel looks into Laura's eyes and takes a sip of the refreshing liquid. Laura says to the dark angel, "Your lies do not frighten me, dark one. It is written that nothing, and that includes you, Evil one, can separate me from the love of God. The blood of Jesus protects me and you know it. Your deceitfulness has found you out."

She turns toward Kirkten and he backs away a step or two and lowers his threatening blade. The reflection of God's love in her eyes is too much for his evil heart to bear. He exclaims, "Don't mention His name here... Go from here now and leave our battle to us."

"One moment, evil one... and I will do just that... By the way, say hello to your friends in the abyss." She takes the flower crown from her head and places it on Blasdon's head. It immediately turns into a crown of faith that spawns another crown called life. She says to Blasdon, "Go, Faithful and True, send this evil servant to his just reward."

Blasdon now has the strength of a hundred angels as he rises to his feet and faces Kirkten. He replies, "I will, God's child... you can count on that."

Carol awakens and finds she is lying in a hospital bed. Brian says, "Hello, sleepy-head. You've been out for almost ten hours... Merry Christmas, Sweetheart... We have a Christmas gift called Michael!"

"Is he okay?"

"Yes, he's doing fine... Man, you really scared us. The whole church has been praying since we found out you were in the hospital. The doctor said that they lost you for a short while but they were able to bring you back."

"What happened? I remember this severe pain in my head and then I fainted."

Brian says, "The doctor thought you had a brain aneurysm, because of the high blood pressure, but the tests came back negative. They had to take Michael to be on the safe side. How do you feel? Do you still have any head pain?"

"No... I feel fine in the head, but I hurt everywhere else. I wish I had been awake for the birth of our son, but in a way, I'm glad to have been out cold."

"Well, the doctor told me not to stay too long... they want you to get plenty of rest. Joey is with the Browns and I'll bring him when I come back. He wants to see you and his new brother too."

"Oh, Brian, that reminds me..."

“What, Sweetheart?”

“While I was out, I dreamed something about Laura.”

“What was that?”

“I remember so little, but we were in a very peaceful and beautiful place talking and she said something about a ‘returned gift’. What does that mean, do you think?”

“You know about dreams... could mean anything.”

Carol says, “It could be about Joey and that she appreciated us taking him in when she died... and she was returning the gift to us.”

Brian replies, “That’s a stretch, Carol, and besides, Joey is a gift in himself... You just had a dream and don’t make too much of it... We all dream and mostly it doesn’t mean anything.”

“Carol says, “Maybe you’re right, Brian. I am tired... Give me a little while and bring Joey back with you. Thank everyone for their prayers... they did the trick.”

“God really did answer a lot of prayers this Christmas. He blessed us greatly. I’ll see you in a little while, Sweetheart.”

Carol calls to Brian as he opens the door, “Brian, what is this?”

“Oh, that’s a flower they found lying next to you on the stretcher when they brought you in. That’s a poinsettia isn’t it? Very fitting for the season. Merry Christmas, Carol.”

Carol looks at the Christmas flower and replies, “Merry Christmas, Brian.”

***Every good and perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,
who does not change like shifting shadows.
James 1:17 NIV***

Heavenly Intervention

Visit Seventy-one



It is about nine o'clock in the morning and a young man stands next to a public phone on a deserted street. Hinden checks the yellow pages until he finds the desired number. He dials the phone and waits for an answer. "Hello, is this Morris Realty? Yes... Did you say your name is Karen? My name is Blake... John Blake. Are you the realtor of the house on Ginger Street? I believe the number is 1007. Yes, I am interested. The ad in the paper says the rent is \$500 a month. Is it possible to see the inside...today? Five o'clock? No... My wife works late, but she can get off for lunch to see the house. Can you make it at one? Yes, that would be great. We'll see you there."

Hinden hangs up the phone and a little smile crosses his mouth. This sounds like it will be easy like the others. Karen... Karen Simmons... that's a nice name... She sounds young... I hope she's young. The neighbors will be at work during the middle of the day... we should have our privacy.

As Karen turns from her phone, her co-employee, Janice asks, "Do you have an appointment?"

"Yes... for the Schultz house on Ginger. A couple by the name of Blake wants to take a look."

The lights here are so bright and the colors so vivid. Time as we know it doesn't exist here in this dimension. There is neither beginning nor end to this place; it is eternal. This place is more intense, meaningful and real compared to the world.

The reality of heaven brings clarity and understanding where darkness and confusion thrived before. Righteousness, truth and love prevail here because Eden is God and he allows only those of his children that possess these qualities through faith in the Son to resume their walk with Him in this beautiful garden. Paul is sitting beneath a large oak tree reading a book. He absentmindedly rubs the fur of his favorite cat, Spice. You can tell Spice is enjoying this attention from his friend as his eyes are closed and he is softly purring.

Paul looks up from his book as he feels the purity of God's presence. He places his book on the ground as he is absorbed into the arms of Jesus. Paul embraces the love and peace that pulsates from the beating heart of his Lord.

Jesus says, "Paul, I need your help. Will you go with my Guardian to assist one of my children?"

Paul replies, "Yes, Lord... I'm ready to go."

Karen leaves her office at twelve-thirty and arrives at the house on Ginger Street at about one o'clock. When she gets out of the car, a well-dressed young man meets her. She asks, "Mister Blake?"

Hinden replies, "Yes... Karen, I presume."

"Where's Mrs. Blake?" Karen asks as she looks around.

"She got stuck in a conference call. I talked to her just a few moments ago and she said it would only be a short while before she arrives. She said to go ahead and start without her."

Karen hesitates a moment, but she doesn't consider the young man a threat so she says, "Okay, follow me. I've got the key."

Once inside, Hinden remarks, "The furniture is very nice in the living room. Is the rest of the house furnished as well?"

"Yes, it is," Karen replies. "Come this way."

She leads Hinden down a hall. The bedrooms adjoin the hallway and she stops at each one for Hinden to see the furnishings.

When they reach the master bedroom, Hinden grabs Karen from behind and throws her on the bed. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a switchblade knife. He stands over her and says, "Be smart, Karen. I'll cut you if you make a sound."

He looks up to the other side of the bed and exclaims, "What are you doing here?!!!"

Karen is amazed to see a gray-striped cat bound onto the bed and spring at the young man.

Hinden screams, "Get away from me, cat... Quit scratching my face..." He turns as he attempts to get the cat off him. He trips over something and smashes into the dresser mirror. The mirror breaks and cuts his face and hands.

As her attacker sprawls on the floor, Karen springs from the bed and flees down the hall to the front door. Two policemen coming into the house with drawn guns meet her. She is very upset and is crying, but she points down the hall toward the bedroom.

The police take Hinden into custody and they take him to the police station. Karen goes to the station to make a report. Janice, her co-employee, meets her there. They learn that Hinden is suspected of at least a dozen assaults on women realtors, two attacks resulted in the victims being injured critically.

"Hinden is a very dangerous scumbag; a rat, actually," observes Sergeant Collins. "Karen, you are very, very lucky."

Karen replies, "Why were you at the house? Were you passing by?"

"Sergeant Collins replies, "We received a call from someone... a male voice, saying that you were in trouble. We were delayed by a traffic accident and we didn't arrive as early as we would have, but you did pretty well by yourself. He got cut up pretty badly. What'd you do... use karate on him or something? He claims a cat scratched him and a guy tripped him into the mirror. Did you see anybody other than Hinden in the room?"

"I did see the cat... it was a gray cat with dark stripes. It jumped at the man and he did fall into the mirror. However, I didn't see any person... just the cat." Karen continues, "I didn't know the Schultz had a cat."

Janice says, "They don't. Mrs. Schultz told me that she is allergic to animal fur and they don't have any pets. Karen, you might consider the possibility that your guardian angel helped you."

Karen laughs and then says, "You sound like my late Uncle Paul. He was always talking about me having an angel that watched over me. He said he saw the angel twice, once when I was terribly sick as a baby. The other time was when I was about seven and the angel saved me from a fatal accident."

"Well, it sounds like he may have saved you a third time," Janice says.

Karen thinks a moment and then says, "Come to think of it, Uncle Paul loved cats and he did have a gray-striped cat that he loved best. The cat disappeared when Uncle Paul died... we never saw him again."

Janice says, "Maybe you just did."

**and into an inheritance that can never
perish, spoil or fade---kept in heaven for you,
who through faith are shielded by God's power
until the coming of the salvation that is ready
to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:4,5 NIV**

The Red Coat

Visit Seventy-two - A Mother's Day Story

The room is very dark and cold. Money has been scarce since Mirah was laid off from a telecom company. Her utility bills are over four months past due and the gas and electricity were turned off a month before the present winter storm arrived.

Mirah's temperature is over a hundred and two. Her head is aching and her chest hurts and she has difficulty breathing. She has been sick for two days and she hasn't eaten very much over that period of time. Mirah feels very weak. You can hear her shallow breathing and raspy coughs.

Celeon is seven years old and her black hair is cut short. She is sitting in the rocker next to her mother's bed and she is concerned that her mother is so sick. There must be something she can do to help her.

Dan Webb has about finished up for the day. His nurse, Rosie, announces, "Doctor Dan, Brenda Daniels is in room B. She's in for a blood pressure check to see about continuing her medication. That should do it for the day."

Doctor Dan hopes so. It had been a long day that started at five this morning when he made his rounds at the hospital. It was now seven o'clock in the evening and he was ready to get home to see his wife and son.

He finishes up with the examination of the last patient and the necessary file work. Rosie and his receptionist, Clara, finish closing up the office and getting ready for tomorrow's visits. Doctor Dan gets in his car and starts down the street toward home. It's eight o'clock and he is dead tired.

The snow-covered streets mean a slow drive for Dan as he maneuvers his car toward home. The snow has started again and is coming down pretty hard. He is traveling through a poor section of town. This area contains apartment buildings, warehouses and deserted businesses. The once prosperous downtown area has fallen on hard times. If they can, people spend their money and live away from town. The streets are narrow and dark and the snow makes it difficult to see clearly.

Suddenly, Dan's headlights illuminate a little girl in a red coat standing in his path. Dan hits the brakes hard, anticipating the car sliding. He is surprised that his car comes to a stop quickly without hitting the little girl.

Dan rolls his window down as Celeon walks around to the driver side of the car. She says, "My mama is very sick. Please come and help her."

Dan replies, "You shouldn't be out in this weather and you don't stand in the middle of the street. You could be hurt. Let me park my car and I'll come with you."

He parks his car at the curb. He grabs his medical bag and says, "You lead the way to your mother."

Celeon nods her head and starts toward a large apartment building. They climb the stairs to the third floor. They arrive at Mirah's apartment and go inside. Dan finds Mirah in bed and he has difficulty getting her to respond to his questions.

After his examination, he asks, "Can you go with me to the hospital or do I need to call an ambulance. You need to go to a hospital, you have pneumonia."

Mirah says with difficulty, "I don't have any money. I can't afford a hospital."

Dan says, "Don't worry about the money. We'll figure something out. When you get better, you might come work for me. I certainly can use extra help." He asks, "Can you make it to my car? Do I need to get an ambulance?"

Mirah replies, "I can go with you... Let me get my robe and a coat."

As Dan helps her out of bed and she goes toward the closet, Dan looks around the room. He asks, "Where's your little girl? She needs to come with us."

Mirah turns back toward Dan and asks, "What little girl... I don't have a little girl."

"Yes, you do... She stopped me in the street and told me about your illness and she showed me the way here. She was wearing a red coat."

Mirah opens the closet and points to a coat hanging on the inside of the door. She asks, "A red coat like this?"

"That's it... that's the one."

Mirah says, "This coat belonged to my daughter, Celeon, but she died two years ago."

**And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.
Luke 9:43 NIV**

Happy Mother's Day!

Never Give Up

Visit Seventy-three - A Father's Day Story

The little chapel is empty because it is very late. A lone figure is kneeling at the richly carved wooden alter. He has been praying for a long, long time; since early afternoon.

The man is dressed modestly but his clothes are clean and he is well groomed. A small silver cross hangs from a simple silver necklace around his neck. He is bowed so low his face is hidden. All you see is his black hair with silver gray mixed in.

Chad prays aloud, "Lord, please grant my request. My son, Blake, still has not accepted your love and asked for your forgiveness. I know I've been praying for many years for his salvation... for him to turn from his life of rebellion and turn to you. Please don't give up on him, Lord.

It's not that he doesn't know about you. We took him to church until he graduated from high school. He thought he didn't have to listen to us or go to church anymore. He kind of wandered off and has gotten involved with drugs and a bad crowd. He's married now and has a beautiful wife and little girl. Give him another chance to come to his senses... Don't give up on him, Jesus... please."

Blake is sitting with two of his buddies at a restaurant in a small town. It is late at night as they have just completed watching their favorite professional basketball team win their game with the local team. The three friends have driven five hours to see the game. They will have a late snack before driving back tonight; they have to work tomorrow.

They are rehashing the game, play by play as they wait for their food to arrive. Blake is laughing at his two friends as they are debating whether the referees were completely crazy on a particular call. He feels a touch on his arm and he turns in his seat. He sees a man about his age standing beside his chair.

The man says, "I want to see you in church Sunday."

Thinking this man is a religious nut and not wanting to make a scene, Blake says quietly, "I don't live here in your town. I'm not going to come to your church."

The man replies, "I didn't say what church... I want to see you in church."

Blake is embarrassed as this man is very persistent. He looks back toward his friends, who are still engaged in their debate and don't seem to have witnessed the

intruder nor his conversation with Blake. In fact, no one at the other tables seem to have witnessed the event.

Blake turns back to tell the young man to leave them alone. He is surprised that the man has disappeared. Blake looks everywhere and although the man didn't have time to leave the building, he is nowhere in sight.

One of Blake's friends asks, "What do you think, Blake?" Which one of us is right?"

Blake scratches his head and replies, "I don't know... I didn't hear you. Didn't you see me talking to this guy who came to our table?"

The two friends look at each other and shake their heads. One says, "I guess we were too busy talking and didn't notice."

After arriving home in the early hours of the morning, Blake awakens his wife, Sarah. After telling her the strange story, he says, "I think God is trying to tell me something. If he goes to the trouble of sending an angel to give me a message, I think I should listen. I'm going to church with you and Maria Sunday."

Sarah is so happy, she embraces her husband and says, "That makes me so happy, Blake. I've been praying you would come with us. It would mean so much to Maria and me too."

Blake is true to his word and starts going to church. It has been six months since the stranger talked to Blake and he has faithfully attended church with Sarah and Maria. He has even given up drugs and alcohol and is attempting to be a model husband and father.

One day, Sarah asks, "Blake, have you given your life to Christ? You know, did you ask Him into your heart... maybe when you were little... growing up?"

"Nah... I just didn't see that it was necessary. I went to church all my life and I was a good guy. Mom and Dad stayed after me to... you know... get saved, but I told them I'd get saved when I was older. Even when I moved out and got my own place, Dad was always bringing it up. He didn't want me to die and not go to heaven."

Sarah says, "Well, I don't want that to happen either. I don't want to go to heaven and not have you with me. Don't you think it's time to get it right with God?"

"Right with God? What more do I need to do? I'm going to church and everything... I've given up my old habits and friends and I'm working at being the best I can for you and Maria. I think I'm pretty right with God. Now, I'm going out and work on the car."

Blake gets his tools and starts working on his car. He drops the drive shaft and gets ready to change out the universal joint. In his haste, he failed to block the tires and without the drive shaft being connected, the car starts to roll down the slight incline of the driveway.

Blake scrambles out from under the car and almost make it completely. His left foot gets caught under the back tire. The tire bends his foot back toward his ankle and his foot acts as a block. He is caught. The car's pressure on his foot causes severe pain. If the tire could have rolled over his foot it would have been better. As it was, all he can do is scream for help. Sarah comes outside when she hears his cries. She attempts to get the car off his foot, but she is not strong enough.

A number of neighbors come running when they hear Blake. They all try to lift the car off his foot, but each time the car moves a little further and makes the pain worse. Someone calls emergency on his cell phone and says help is on the way.

Blake looks across the street and sees a muscular man running toward him. As the man arrives, he immediately grabs the back bumper and starts to lift the car. Blake thinks the man crazy as he knows how high the car must be lifted to do any good. He is amazed as the car body keeps moving upward and finally the wheel pressure is released and Blake removes his foot. He doesn't know whether the man says the words as it is more like a message in his head, but the words 'get right with God' are heard.

He looks around and the big man is nowhere in sight. His wife and neighbors are excited that he got his foot out from under the car. He asks his wife, "Did you see the big guy come and lift the car off my foot?"

"No, Blake, I thought you pulled it out yourself. Where is the man?"

"I don't see him. See if anyone knows of him or saw where he went. I'd like to thank him myself."

Sarah asks the neighbors, but no one saw the big man or know anyone by that description in the neighborhood. They also thought that Blake had rescued himself.

The emergency crew arrives and examines Blake. They can't believe from Blake's description of the circumstances that his foot is not broken or the ankle ligaments torn. He should be experiencing a huge amount of pain, but he isn't. It's as if nothing happened.

After everyone has gone back home, Blake says to Sarah, "You know... you'll think I'm crazy, but I know that God sent that big guy to deliver a message that I need to get right with Him. I know... you told me that also, but this event got it though my thick head. I'm calling Brother Al... I'm going to get this settled right now."

Chad is still praying at the alter when he feels a gentle touch on his arm. He looks up into Jesus' face. Jesus says, "Your prayers are answered, my son. Blake will be coming to live with us. Your faithfulness and patience have been rewarded."

Chad embraces his Lord and replies, "Thank you, Jesus, for not giving up on him."

Jesus says, "How could I? Your love never gave up."

Come Home, Monte

Visit Seventy-four

You can't really see the sun in heaven as you do in the world. The sun is actually replaced by a magnificent glow that emulates from the very heart of God. The light in heaven is more intense, more illuminating, and more peaceful than the sunlight of earth. It is God's love for his children that permeates the endless reaches and regions of this eternal place we call heaven.

This glow reaches down into the very souls of heaven's inhabitants to cleanse and refresh the eternal spirits that are the image of the creator. It is no accident, no fluke, or no mere chance that the souls that enjoy the companionship of their creator have arrived home to this beautiful, breathtaking, bountiful garden of love. They made the right choice, they accepted God's unqualified love, they sought wisdom over knowledge, faith over sight, and truth over lies.

At some time, in their earthly life, someone loved them so much that they told them of a loving God. A God who wanted their companionship so badly he sent his only Son, Jesus, to die for them, to take upon Himself, the sinless lamb, their punishment, their just reward; death and separation from God, so they might live forever with the Father. Not only that, but when they heard this gospel they responded, believing by faith God's promises and taking the Hand of God that reached through time and space into their sinful hearts. They made the right choice, a choice of wisdom to reach their destiny, their eternal home, heaven.

As we look closely, we find a young man grooming a black Labrador inside his little shop on the outskirts of Myriam, a small town situated near the River of Life that flows from the Holy City. Doyle has been in heaven only a short time by our standards. He has no concept of time which doesn't really exist in heaven nor does he exhibit any affects of the illness that racked his body during the last days of what we call "life" on earth. He was reborn the instant he accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord and this reborn creation that embraced true "life" at the Gate to Eden is who we now see.

Doyle spent most of his earthly life working with animals. He treated many of his two and four-legged friends throughout his time in the world and it is only natural that Jesus allowed him to continue his work in heaven. Health is not an issue in heaven for even animals. Doyle's main occupation is caring for the animals that have preceded their earthly owners in coming home.

Doyle finishes with the big black dog and places him in the enclosure behind his shop with the rest of the animals. He returns to the front of the building where he finds a close friend, Blasdon, the Guardian, waiting. Doyle asks, "Blasdon, what are you doing here, my friend? Are you picking up one of my charges for a recent arrival?"

Blasdon replies, "Not this time, God's child. I need your help in the world, as someone will be coming home soon. Jesus says it is all right. Will you come with me?"

“Of course, my friend. How can I refuse someone who helped me so many times in the world? When do we go?”

“Now, Doyle. We need to go now.”

It is about eleven at night. Patrick is watching his old friend, Monte, through the kitchen door window leading to the garage. He sees Monte drag his arthritic back legs onto a dog bed placed outside of the kitchen door.

Sally, Patrick’s wife, says, “He is getting so feeble and he’s in so much pain because of his legs. He is getting deaf, too. We need to put Monte down, Patrick.”

“I know, Sally. It’s just that it’s kind of hard to make that decision. I’ll look for a veterinarian tomorrow and see about taking Monte in.”

Simon watches from his vantage point in the alley as the lights in the house go out. “Finally,” he thinks. “I didn’t think they would ever go to bed.”

He has been on cocaine for about six months. Simon lost his job a few weeks ago because of his drug habit. Breaking into homes has become his only means to provide funds for the cocaine that his body now craves so desperately.

Kalizar, the demon, clings like a leech as he whispers evil thoughts in Simon’s ear. “Be sure to take your knife. Give them enough time to get to sleep. You may need to kill them... you need money... a lot of money and they have it. Don’t get so impatient... wait for the right time. Use the garage... the door is open.” Kalizar smiles as his puppet follows his directions. He knows that his master, Lucifer, will be pleased.

Simon slips through the darkness as he hugs the garage outer wall until he comes to the open back door. “If they get in my way, I’ll take them out. They have plenty of money... it’s not fair.” He enters the near dark garage and heads towards the kitchen door. He is a few feet from the door when he hears a low growl and turns.

Simon screams as a huge animal hits his chest and the pain in his arm is terrible as teeth break the skin. The knife goes flying as Simon flings his attacker away from him and he bolts out the garage door.

Patrick opens the door for the policeman and invites him inside the house. Patrolman Don Davis says, "We caught this punk down the street. He was running like the devil was after him. When your call came in about an attempted robbery, we kind of put two and two together. There have been a number of unsolved break-ins lately and I believe we have the culprit. It is strange... He contends a huge dog attacked and bit his arm. He says he lost his knife because of it."

Patrick offers a switchblade knife to the Patrolman. "I found this in the garage and I used a cloth to pick it up."

Davis says, "That about does it. If he confirms this is his knife and maybe we'll find a fingerprint or two that will cinch it for us. One thing, do you have a dog like he describes?"

Patrick replies, "Not really... Let me show you, Officer." He opens the back door and continues, "Monte died in his sleep... He's right there in his bed. I'm glad because he was so very sick. I was having trouble making the right decision for him."

Davis says, "I can understand... Well, that wraps it up. I didn't think that dope head was operating in reality. He was screaming about his bloody arm and there wasn't anything wrong with his arm. He was just hallucinating. Thanks for your help. You will need to come down in the morning and sign some papers."

After the officer leaves and the couple get back into bed, Patrick says, "I'm glad that's over. We've had quite a night of it. I'll go in late to work tomorrow and take care of this business and also take care of Monte."

Sally says, "I sorry about Monte, but it is the best thing. He was hurting so much."

"I'm glad he went like he did. I just couldn't bring myself to put him to sleep. If Doyle was still alive, I would have felt better taking Monte to him. Doyle saved Monte's life when he was a puppy and took care of him all the time. You knew Doyle loved Monte and finding someone like him is hard."

As Doyle and Monte pass from this dimension into eternity, Monte runs ahead of his old friend toward the bright light. There is no evidence of the crippling affects of age or disease and Monte feels like a puppy as he runs back to Doyle and leaps into his arms.

Monte will be waiting for Patrick and Sally when they come home too.

Inspired by the life of a good friend to our family and our animals, Doyle Johnson, DVM. He is sorely missed.

The Bell Tolls for Thee

Visit Seventy-five – A Christmas Story

The young boy is excited as he hurries down the busy, gold-paved streets of his city. This is one of the most important days in the lives of heaven's inhabitants and every town, big or small, is making arrangements for this special time. It's Christmas day.

Kevin is a little worried because it is almost time for the choir to sing. Today is the celebration of God's special love-gift to mankind and no one should be late on this special day. Kevin knows the choir leader, Brother Bill, will be unhappy if he is late.

Kevin does have a reason for his tardiness. He is holding tightly to a silver bell ornament that he wants to place on the Christmas tree outside the little church at the outskirts of his town. He just finished making the ornament and this caused him to run late this morning.

As he arrives at the little church, he hears the piano rendition of his favorite hymn, "O, Little Town of Bethlehem", being played by Yvonne. The Christmas tree is located outside the church near the front door for all to see. Kevin finds a vacant branch for his special ornament.

As he turns from the tree, he is consumed by God's love and is drawn to the very heart of his savior. Joy and peace are overwhelming as Kevin floats in the arms of Jesus.

"I love you, Lord", Kevin says. "We honor you today in remembrance of your sacrifice and love for us, your children."

Jesus replies, "Yes, my child, and there could be a moment in time that might be special for someone else. Will you help me?"

"Yes, Lord. You know I will. What is your need?"

"I need to get a message to someone. Go with Blasdon. It won't take long and you'll be back in plenty of time for the celebration."

Blevins is more than a little concerned. When he left the motel in town this morning, there was only a little snow falling. The forecast didn't say anything about this blizzard he was traveling through. Why was this happening to him? This is the reason he left this northern area, to get away from this white-devil stuff called snow. It was snowing **that** day too.

He is driving very slow, just creeping along really, trying to find his way down this country road. This is the same road he used many, many years ago on the way to a favorite fishing spot at the river. Time has changed the features and landmarks he

remembers from long ago. Now that the snow has become thicker he cannot see clearly and doesn't recognize the way.

He says aloud as he wipes the moisture from the inside of the windshield, "Mom, I wish I hadn't promised you I would come back here. You shouldn't have asked me... you know how hard this is."

Blevins' mother went home to heaven about a week ago. Before she died, she made Blevins promise to come back to this place that changed his life years ago. She knew that he needed to forgive himself, and more importantly, to get right with God.

He was afraid to turn the car around and go back as the road was very narrow and he might get stuck. If that happened he would freeze to death after the car ran out of gas. He had to keep going and hopefully find his way to the community he used to call home. So many years have passed and it could be that no one lived there that he once knew.

"I can't see enough to find the split in the road and take the correct direction to the right. I can only make out the left side of the road and I know that split is around here."

As he strains to find anything familiar to guide his way, he is startled to see a man standing on the side of the road. When he comes closer, the man points to the right and Blevins turns the wheel in that direction. Blevins is relieved that he found the fork and takes the correct road. He looks back, but can't see the man. He assumes the man's house is nearby.

"How did he know that I needed to take the right fork in the road? Maybe the left fork is impassible and he was telling me this is the only road still open. I'll have to come back this way to thank him."

About an hour later, the snow hasn't diminished and Blevins is still creeping along, trying to find his way. He exclaims, "Oh, no... don't let it happen!" The engine light on his dash is blinking a dreaded message.

A short distance down the road his car sputters and comes to a stop. Blevins bangs his head on the steering wheel in frustration. "What can I do now? I don't know how much further I need to go." He bows his head and prays aloud, "God, I don't know where I am and I've never prayed or asked you for anything. Please help me find the church... I don't know what to do... I'm lost... please help me. There's no reason why you should... I've done nothing for you all these years... please help me, God?"

As he sits and stares blindly at the thick, falling snow outside the cold car, he realizes that he can hear a faint sound from outside the car. He rolls down the window slightly and listens. There it is, the unmistakable sound of a bell.

"That must be the church bell... I believe the sound is coming from over there. I don't know how far away it is, but maybe I can make it though the snow. It's better than freezing to death in here."

Blevins gets out of the car and finds the snow is about a foot deep. He slowly plods his way up the road, listening for the sound of the bell. The bell keeps drawing him further and further on this snow-clogged path. His feet are frozen and the cold wind whips his body through his heavy coat, but he keeps struggling toward the sound.

He is ready to give up when he spies the familiar steeple of a church. He remembers the church is situated just off the road. His spirits are lifted as he hurries toward his objective.

The little door of the country church is decorated with an evergreen wreath. Blevins notices that the church has deteriorated over the years. It needs painting and some rotting boards need replacing.

He doesn't recall when it happened, but the bell isn't ringing anymore. He knocks on the door of the old church, but no response. He bangs loudly on the old door hoping that possibly someone is inside.

A man's voice from behind startles him, "What are you doing, Son? The Christmas service won't start for over an hour."

Blevins turns to see an old man standing on the porch steps. He replies, "My car stalled down the road and I'm freezing. Is there a place to get warm?"

"Why sure, Son... come next door to my home. Let's get you some heat."

After they get inside, Blevins takes off his coat and gets close to the space heater in the living room. The old man brings him a cup of coffee and says, "My name is Martin, I'm the pastor of the church next door."

Blevins exclaims, "I remember! You're Pastor Martin... You were the minister when we used to live here. My name's Blevins... Blevins Stanton."

"Stanton... let me see... Oh yes, your parents are Melvin and Lilla Stanton. I remember now... how could I forget... that was my first year as pastor here... that's been over thirty years ago. It seems like just yesterday. I'm so sorry about your brother's death... It's been many years and the church isn't over it. I don't guess we ever will really. Your family moved away so fast after his death and we didn't know where you went. We wanted to stay in contact."

Blevins says, "We had to get away... Actually, my parents knew I needed to get away. I could feel the looks of everyone, blaming me for his death. We started over again in a town down south."

"No one blamed you for Kevin's death. Why would they?"

Blevins looks down at the cup in his hands. He says, “I dared him to do it. He wouldn’t have done it if it hadn’t been a dare. Everyone knew I was responsible... I knew it.”

Pastor Martin asks, “What dare?”

“Before he left to go to church that morning, I dared him to climb the rope to the bell tower. When he did, the bell broke loose and fell on him... and Kevin died.”

“He wasn’t climbing the rope... I was there that morning getting ready for the early service. He just pulled the rope like he always did each Sunday. I watched the bell fall on him... it was terrible... The doctors said it was instantaneous. I struggled myself for weeks thinking I might have done something that would have made a difference. There just wasn’t anything anyone could have done. Oh, how I wished we had talked... I didn’t know you felt responsible. You disappeared so soon after the funeral that I didn’t have a chance. You’re not guilty of anything, Blevins. You’ve carried this feeling for no reason. It was an accident... that’s all.”

Blevins breaks down and he bows his head as his shoulders shake with the released emotion. He says through the tears, “I didn’t tell anyone... not even Mom or Dad. I finally told Mom after Dad died five years ago. I thought I caused Kevin’s death.”

After several seconds, Blevins composes himself and he continues, “Mom was so right. She made me come back to face my guilt. It’s kind of ironic when you think about it. I wouldn’t have made it here if it hadn’t been for your church bell ringing to show me the way.”

Pastor Martin asks, “What did you say? Bell? We don’t have a bell anymore. We didn’t replace the bell after that day. It’s down in the storage room. You couldn’t have heard any bell... at least not from this church tower.”

“What are you saying, Pastor?”

“I think God loves you so much he wanted you to make it here to find the truth and peace. I think He had Kevin ring a church bell in heaven that helped you find the way.”

Blevins says, “Can you help me, Pastor? The only way I’m going to find real peace is through Jesus Christ.”

Kevin and Jesus are standing beside the Christmas tree in front of the Chapel. “Did I do all right, Jesus?” Kevin asks.

Jesus replies, “You did just fine, my child.”

Kevin hears the ringing of his bell ornament on the tree. He asks, "What does it mean, Lord?"

"It means that your brother is coming to live with us forever. Go to the service and tell your mother and father. You have another reason for celebrating today."

Kevin yells as he runs toward the church entrance, "Thank you, Jesus! Happy Birthday!"

Jesus calls back to him, "Merry Christmas, Kevin!"

....for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.
John Donne (1571 – 1631)

Sword of Truth

Visit Seventy-six (2004 Easter Story)



Jardish is sitting cross-legged and leaning back against a palm tree. He is watching a distant figure approaching from the east just this side of the edge of time.

His thoughts are interrupted by Immish, “Do you see him, my brother?”

The warrior replies, “Yes... Another one comes... what do you think... Human or Demon?”

“Too soon to tell for certain,” Immish squints his eyes as the smoke from the abyss fires snake across the plains of Armageddon and obscures the distant figure. He continues as the figure grows larger from its advance through the desolate area toward the Gate, “It won’t be long before we’ll know for certain.”

Soon the figure is close enough for identification. Jardish says, “It’s one called woman... a human. What do you think?... purified or tainted?”

Immish replies, “Don’t know for certain, but my guess... tainted.”

Jardish watches the tall, young woman approach their guard post east of the Gate into Eden. He says, "She does look proud... very confident... very self-assured. I tend to agree with you, my brother."

Jardish rises to his feet and the two guards wait for the intruder to reach them. Jardish is holding his sword at the ready and Immish is holding a large book. The woman climbs up the rocky path toward the light coming from beyond the golden gate. She shields her eyes from the light from God's heart that illuminates Eden's endless realms.

The two angels confront the woman. Jardish asks, "Where are you going, woman?"

The woman replies, "Inside... the light. I need to go inside to the warm light. I'm cold."

Immish says, "You can't go inside unless your name is in the Book of Life. What is your name?"

The woman replies, "My name? My name is Martha... Martha McQuins. Check your book... I'm certain I have a reservation."

Immish opens the book and flips pages until he comes to the correct page. He says, "I'm sorry, Martha McQuins... Your name is not here."

"It should be... How do you get in that book... You don't think I'm good enough to be in that book? Why... I've done so many good things in the...the... from over there..." She points back to where she came. "We.... I gave to charities... a lot of money to a number of charities. And... I was high up in a woman's organization for our rights. And I did meditations every day and followed those star charts. I even marched against that bad war... you know the one in that little country... something... Nam. There... you can see that I deserve to be inside."

Jardish laughs and then he says, "None of you deserve to return to Eden. If your name is not present in the book, then you do not possess God's gift of life."

The woman becomes very angry as she yells at Jardish, "I will go inside! You can't keep me out!"

She starts toward Jardish. He holds up his sword and it erupts into a tongue of flame.

The woman screams and suddenly her young smooth skin turns wrinkled and hard. Her beautiful contenance is transformed into a hideous image of a decayed and corrupt life.

She stumbles backward from the flames. Her skin texture and beautiful appearance return once again. She says, "There... that's the way it should be. I don't

want to go in... you cause me to become what I was when I was over there... back to where I was... in the world. The cancer had caused so much damage. I have been healed from that horrible disease.”

Immish says, “Keep traveling the way you were going. You will be contacted on your eternal destiny, a place that you decided was home long ago. I believe it will be a warm place... not one you will enjoy, but it will be warm.”

The woman looks longingly toward the light once again. She turns and slowly trudges down the hill and turns toward the west where the thickest smoke and flames can be seen. The two angels return to their guard duties.

Soon another figure approaches the Gate. It is a man human. He is young and handsome with a tall powerfully built body and dark skin and hair.

“My name is Frederick K. Stone,” he says. “I’m certain my name is in your book.” He exclaims when Immish shakes his head, “What! Do you know who you are talking to!?”

Immish replies, “Frederick K. Stone?”

“That’s correct, my smart friend. I have been involved in evangelical work all my born days. There were many souls added to The Supreme Father’s kingdom because of my work. I know I will be granted entrance into that holy place because of who I am...and... I will be asked by the Supreme Being to lead my followers who preceded me here or will be coming soon. I will receive the honor and glory due a person of my stature in life.”

Jardish asks, “But the most important question is: do you know Jesus?”

“Jesus? Of course, I know Jesus... A great man... His example and leadership is the basis for all spiritual guides. I’m looking forward to meeting him.”

“You should have met him before stepping into this dimension. You had plenty of opportunities. It’s too late now.”

Stone asks, “Too late... What do you mean, ‘too late’?”

Jardish replies, “You have to move on... You cannot enter.”

“I’m not letting a lackey keep me from my destiny... my reward. Get out of my way!”

As the man reaches out to push Jardish out of the way, Jardish holds up the sword. The sword erupts instantly into a brilliant flame.

The man throws up his hands in defense and he turns his head from the intrusion of truth into his soul. He screams and yells, "Get that away from me!! I'll go! I'll find a place that longs for my talent and abilities."

Immish says, "Keep traveling the direction you were going and you will be contacted. I'm sorry your choices have resulted in this judgment."

Stone says, "Don't feel sorry for me... I've always done all right for myself. The Supreme One... the true and only Guide will find me and beg me to enter his kingdom."

Jardish says, "I'm certain you will get your just reward."

Immish looks toward the East and remarks, "I don't see any coming at the moment. There certainly have been a large group coming our way. What do you think?... 100?...200?"

Jardish replies, "I think it is more like 2000. And not a purified one among them all. It's tragic... I don't like to see the tears in our Lord's eyes. He tried so hard and gave so much to reach these humans... to make a way for them to return to Him, to return to the beautiful Garden He created for them. How could they reject His Love?"

"Another is coming," Immish says. "I believe it's a human... a man human."

Jardish squints his eyes and says, "He's an old one... Look how he limps. What do you think?"

Immish scratches his chin and looks toward the figure coming closer to their location. He says, "I see no reason to change... I believe... tainted. What do you think?"

"Same."

The old man limps up the path toward the two angels. His face is weathered and wrinkled, but his eyes are sharp and clear.

Jardish steps in the old man's path and holds up his hand. He asks, "Where are you going, old man?"

"I'm looking for heaven... I'm looking for home. Is this heaven?"

Immish says, "It is..." He asks, "Are you worthy to go into heaven?"

The old man eyes fill with tears at the question. He says, "Oh no... I deserve the second death... I deserve the correct punishment of Hell. I don't deserve God's Love or heaven."

Jardish looks at Immish. He asks, “Then why should we let you in... in to heaven?”

The old man proudly says, “Jesus said... I could go to heaven.”

Jardish smiles and he winks at Immish, He asks the old man, “So you know Jesus? When did you meet Jesus?”

“It was one Easter service when I was twelve years old. I asked Jesus to come into my heart and... He did. He forgave me of all my sins... past, present and future. I don’t deserve the gift of his salvation, but He gave me this precious gift. He died in my place... his sacrifice paid my debt that was due because of my sin.”

Immish asks, “What is your name, old man?”

“Will Garrison...”

Immish checks the pages of The Book. He looks up, smiles and then says, “You are correct, Will. Your debt was paid in full and your name was written down.”

Jardish holds up his sword as Will starts toward the Gate. The sword of truth erupts into a tongue of flame. Immediately, Will is transformed from a tired and wrinkled old man to a young man, revealing the true image of one of God’s children.

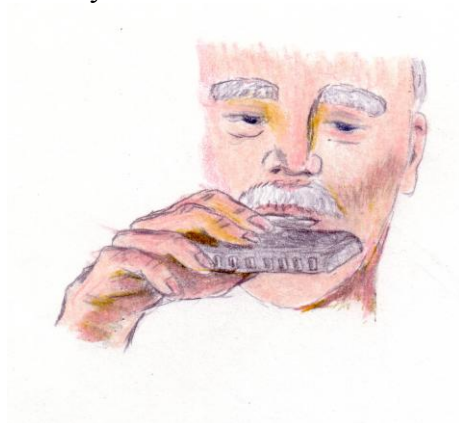
“I’m glad you have come home, Will.”

At the sound of His voice, Will turns and immediately recognizes his savior. He runs into the open arms of Jesus. He exclaims, “Thank you! Thank you, Lord, for your love.”

Jesus says, “And thank you for your faithfulness, Will. Come with me to your just reward. The tree of life awaits you, my son.”

Jesus has His arm around Will’s shoulders as they walk through the Gate. He continues, “Oh, I have something for you, Will.” Jesus holds out his hand.

Will exclaims, “Oh, Lord! My harmonica!”



“Yes... I’ve always enjoyed your music, Will.”

As they go through the Gate, Will begins playing his harmonica. Jesus says, “That’s one of my favorites too, Will.”

*After he drove the man out,
he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden
cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and
forth to guard the way to the tree of life.
Genesis 3:24*

Inspired by the life and witness of Reverend J.W. “Brother Bill” Hamilton. We all miss his preaching, his counsel, his friendship and, of course, his music.

Cory and Holly's Hiding Place

Visit Seventy-seven –(2004 Mother's Day Story)

It is a cool spring morning in May as members and guests of the white chapel make their way to celebrate a special group of people. This service has been planned to say thank you to those unique women called Mothers.

As they enter the chapel, the members see various pots containing roses and other brightly colored flowers sitting on the window ledges and across the front of the sanctuary. In a short time, the brightly decorated chapel begins to fill with worshippers looking forward to the music, special chalk drawing and sermon of the pastor and the covered-dish lunch after the service.

A little girl, who appears about four years old, is unnoticed among the crowd as she enters through the back door of the chapel and turns to the right. She slips through the open door of the prayer room and climbs onto a tall stool next to the open door. She has an unobstructed view of the podium and choir.

Holly is wearing a pretty, red dress and black-patent shoes. A small red corsage has been pinned to her dress as a tribute to her mother.

Everyone is taking their seats in the church pews. Good friends and acquaintances are greeting each other and discussions about the latest events in their lives takes place. Children are anxious and looking forward to the cake and ice cream that will be served after the service.

Cory's mother is talking to his aunt. They are sitting in the back pew and Cory is sitting in the isle seat next to the wall. A big person is sitting in front of him and Cory cannot see. He looks back and sees Holly sitting on the stool in the back room.

He leans next to his mother's ear trying to get her attention, "Mom... mom... I'm going to sit with Holly so I can see." His mother turns toward him and smiles, but doesn't say anything. She returns to her conversation with his aunt.

Cory gets up from his seat and goes to the prayer room. He says, "Hi, Holly. Can I sit with you?"

"Sure, Cory... Take this other stool. You can see really, really good." As he climbs onto the stool, Holly continues, "I didn't think I would see you here, Cory."

"I like seeing Brother Al's drawings and all the people."

The music has started and the sounds of worship fill the little chapel. The children's sermon about Jesus' mother, Mary, is presented by Michelle. Flower awards

are given to various mothers for the: oldest, youngest and most children categories of mothers.

The music minister has chosen a number of familiar hymns to accompany the pastor's chalk drawing. His picture soon evolves into a meaningful scriptural message involving a lighted candle, a child and a mother.

The pastor begins his sermon, "The world was shrouded in the darkness of sin. Because of God's love, He sent the 'light of the world', His Son, Jesus, to redeem our souls from hell and make a way for our return to Him. The candle in the picture represents this light that can change our lives. It is God's gift to a dying world."

God gives us another gift... the gift of a child. The entrance of a child into our lives changes us forever. We have an awesome responsibility to introduce this gift to the Giver of life. That's where our mother's take center stage. Our mother's love and nurturing provide the base on which God can build a bridge to rescue a lost soul from certain everlasting death.

Holly whispers to Cory, "Let's go outside before the service is over. I want to show you something."

Cory says, "Okay... But I've got to tell Mother... I'll be right back." He gets off his stool and runs to the pew where his mother is sitting. He leans over and whispers in her ear. He kisses her on her cheek and runs back to where Holly is standing. He says, "Let's go, Holly."

The two children start out the front door as the pastor makes an invitation to anyone to accept Jesus Christ as their savior. Cory pauses before shutting the door. The congregation is singing a familiar hymn and Cory watches as his mother moves down the aisle in response to the pastor's plea.

The two children run down the front steps and head to a small group of trees and benches next to the church. Holly pulls a blossom from one of the trees and shows it to Cory. She says, "See, Cory... this is a Dogwood tree blossom. See the three red dots... Mother says this blossom is God's reminder of the three crosses and Jesus dying for us."

Cory says, "I know, Holly... I was with you when she told us... remember?"

"Oh... yeah. I remember."

"Holly Renee Blessing! Why didn't you sit with us? Maggie said she saw you in the back. I saved you a place down near the front." Holly turns as her mother approaches.

Holly says, "I was in our hiding place in the back, Mom. I told you I would be there when we got out of the car."

"I didn't hear you say that, young lady. This was something we should do as a family. I really wanted you to sit with me today."

“Mom... I was with Cory. We saw the whole service and then came out here so I could show him the Dogwood blossoms like we did last year.”

“Don’t give me that, Holly. You know Cory went to heaven two months ago.”

“I know, Mother, but Cory was here with me this morning.

“Jeannie! Jeannie, can I speak with you?”

Holly’s mother turns to see Cory’s mother approaching. She says, “Why yes, Peggy. Can I help you?”

“When Cory was saved last year, I was upset. I let him go to church with your family and you told him about Jesus. That caused a lot of problems in our family. He accepted Jesus soon afterward. Then Cory started asking me if I knew Jesus... he kept after me and finally I told him to quit bothering me... I would accept Jesus when I was ready. When Cory died...” Tears start down her face and she reaches for a handkerchief.

She composes herself and continues, “I took it out on Holly and your family. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me for saying what I did... I haven’t had any peace since Cory died. I wanted you to know that I accepted Jesus this morning. And I felt that Cory was with me and I could even hear him saying, like he use to, that I needed to get right with Jesus. You’ll think I’m crazy, but I even thought Cory kissed me on the cheek in the service. I am at peace now and so very happy.”

“Thank you for all you have done for Cory and me. Because of your concern for Cory, he is in heaven now and I’ll get to see him again. Your love started something that changed the destiny of two people. Thank you... so, so much.”

“You’re welcome, Peggy. But...Holly and I... we didn’t want to go to heaven and have Jesus ask us why we didn’t care for Cory’s soul. We had to tell him about Jesus... God did the rest.”

Jeannie turns to Holly and says, “I’m sorry for doubting you, Holly.” She bends down and takes Holly in her arms and gives her a big hug.

Holly says, “Happy Mother’s Day, Mom! A pretty good present, huh?”

Her mother says, “You bet, Holly... the very best present ever.”

Cory is sitting in Jesus' lap. Cory asks, "Mom will be coming to be with us... right, Jesus?"

Jesus hugs his adopted son and replies, "Yes, Cory. Because of your love and the love of those around her, your mother made the decision to accept Father's gift of eternity. She will be here with us some day.

"That's awesome, Jesus! Say, Jesus... The guys are getting together for a game. Want to play some baseball?"

"You bet, Cory... let's go!"

The Shepherd's Provision

Visit Seventy-eight

Ranger Blevins tries unsuccessfully to console the weeping mother. Marisol wails, "Where can she be? Oh, God, don't let anything happen to my little baby... Please God!"

Raul, her husband, pulls her into his arms and says quietly, "Please, Marisol, don't do this. It does no good. Let's try to figure out where Rachel has gone. The Rangers will help us find her. It will be okay."

Ranger Blevins asks, "Do you remember when you first noticed that your daughter was missing?"

Raul looks at his watch and replies, "I believe it's been about an hour when we couldn't find her. We were busy cleaning some fish for supper and didn't notice that she wasn't around. We called for her and searched near the campsite and then contacted you when we couldn't find her. What do we do now?"

"I've contacted the Sheriff's department and they should be here soon. There is only one other Park Ranger on duty this afternoon, but we have requested some off-duty rangers to come in. We'll have plenty of help in searching. Do you have any idea where she might have gone and why?"

Raul scratches his head and then replies, "I can't think of any reason. We were planning on going home tomorrow and she was disappointed. I don't have any idea where she would go."

"She's looking for the white dogs." Marisol says in a quiet voice.

Raul turns toward his wife. He asks, "What did you say, honey? What about dogs?"

Marisol replies, "She mentioned them this morning. She told me she saw two white dogs down by the river and she petted them." Marisol sees her husband's facial expression and she continues, "Yes. I know. I told her it isn't good to be around stray dogs or touch dogs that might be sick. She said they weren't sick and she wanted to go play with them. I told her no... to stay close to the tent until we could go with her."

Ranger Blevins asks, "When was that, Mrs. Rodriguez?"

"After lunch... a little after one o'clock."

Ranger Blevins looks at his watch. It's three now. She might have a couple of hours head start on us. It gets dark early around here... we might have until five before we run out of sunlight. What was she wearing?"

Marisol replies, “She had a long-sleeved shirt and long pants with her knitted gloves. She also has her blanket. She hardly goes anywhere without it.”

“Well, let’s head toward the river and check that out since that was where she saw the dogs.” Ranger Blevins didn’t want to alarm the parents, but it was supposed to get very cold tonight. He was also thinking the dogs might be wild or maybe even wolves since he hadn’t had any reports concerning them. He was more than a little concerned for Rachel’s safety.

In the land beyond the ticking of the clock, where dreams are the only reality and hope has been fulfilled, you feel the gentle breeze of grace on your face and smell the rosy fragrance of faith. You immediately have the impression of joy and laughter cascades from your mouth like rushing water from thawed winter snow in early springtime. Your soul shoots into the air like a blazing rocket and then bursts into brilliant red, yellow and blue spears of flame. You float on white puffy clouds in the sky and then gently glide like a feather to the ground.

Then you notice the Guardian, Blasdon, running toward a young man named Michael as he plays a game of fetch with his white Shepherd dogs, Blaze and Cricket, nearby.

Blasdon says, “Michael, you can’t go to the world unescorted. It’s not allowed. You know the dangers and the Lord does not want you to go without a Guardian.”

“It’s okay, Blasdon. I was very careful and slipped past the demon guards unnoticed. I only stayed a few of their hours. Blaze and Cricket had a great time.”

“You **were** noticed. You were seen by one of God’s little ones. Did you speak to her?”

Michael looked away from the angel’s piercing stare and took a deep breath. He said in a low voice, “I might have talked a little to her... she loved the dogs. We didn’t talk too long... I told her we had to go.”

Well, the devil is using this violation of space and time to his advantage. He has caused the little one to disobey her mother and she is now looking for you and your white friends. The Lord wants this rectified now... You know he has plans for the little one and we have to make this right. Are you ready?”

Michael nods his head and in a blink of an eye he, Blasdon, and the Shepherds vanish.

Rachel has been walking for hours and she is lost. It is dark and she is tired, cold, hungry and she is crying because she is very scared. "Mommy! Where are you?! Daddy!" She yells as loud as she can which is not very loud due to her crying.

Rachel thought she knew the way to the river, but for some reason, she turned left on the path instead of right and became lost in the thick growth of trees and briars. She wandered further and further away from the river. She walked up a steep incline to the top of a high hill which is not anywhere near the river where the search for her is about to end in that area. All she sees is the tops of tall oak trees. She can't even see the river in any direction she looks.

Rachel finds a deep recess in the side of the hill and she lay down on the ground with her blanket wrapped around her. Soon Rachel stops yelling for help and cries herself asleep.

However, her cries for help have attracted attention. It is attention that is not desired and very dangerous. Two dark four-footed shapes are slowly climbing the same incline to where Rachel is softly whimpering in her sleep.

There are about ten rangers and sheriff deputies that have scoured every inch of the river area looking for Rachel. Some of the searchers are speculating that she may have fallen in the river and drowned. Unknown to the distraught parents, the sheriff has made a call for divers to arrive in the morning.

Marisol is frantic and is crying. Raul tries to comfort her, "We'll find her, baby. Don't cry."

"Where can she be?" Marisol wails. "She must have gone another way and became lost. She's not here."

Ranger Blevins has approached the couple. He says, "We agree, Mrs. Rodriguez. We are going toward that high hill over there. We've searched everywhere in this area. We'll probably find her on the way." He calls to the group, "Let's go everyone."

It takes about an hour for the group of searchers to travel the distance between the river and the hill. The darkness and the heavy underbrush is making travel very slow. Raul holds Marisol to his body for protection against the thorns and briars as they push ahead of the search group.

"We went to that hill yesterday... remember, baby?" Raul says. "I believe she's up there... I feel it in my soul. We'll find her there... don't worry."

Marisol prays as she stumbles along with Raul, "Please, God. Help us... help my little girl. Don't let anything happen to her... Please, God."

As they get closer to the top of the hill, Ranger Blevins calls from behind, "Wait for us... Don't get too far ahead."

Raul shines his flashlight around the area and the light finds the recess in the hillside. He sees two white dogs lying on the ground with a small shape between them. He makes out Rachel's blanket and he yells, "Get away from her!"

He runs toward the recess, waving his arms and yelling. The two dogs leap up and disappear over the top of the hill.

Raul with Marisol close behind arrive where Rachel is laying on the ground. Raul scoops her up in his arms. Rachel awakes and yells, "Mommy! Daddy! You found me!"

Ranger Blevins and the search group arrive. He says, "Oh, this is great news. I can tell you I was very afraid for your daughter. There has been reports of wolves in the park and she is very lucky."

One of the searchers calls, "Ranger, come look at this!"

The ranger goes down the hill a short distance to where the group is gathered. He exclaims, "Wow! Those are two big wolves. What got hold of them. It must have been a bear... They are really torn up."

Raul is holding Rachel in his arms as the family comes to where the group is standing. He says, "I saw the white dogs... they look like German Shepherds to me. I thought they were harming Rachel, but she says, they were lying close to her and keeping her warm."

Rachel says, "Yes... they were really warm. The nice man sat with us too. They are his dogs, you know. I felt real safe."

"What man, honey?" Raul asks. "I didn't see any man when I arrived."

"He was there... I went to sleep and I don't know where he went."

"Did he say anything to you? I want to thank him. Did he tell you his name?" Marisol asks.

"He only said one thing to me that I remember. I think he said 'the shepherd provides for his sheep' or something like that." Rachel thinks a moment and then blurts out, "Oh! Oh! He also said to tell you, Daddy, that the red socks did win the... world... the world serious. Then he laughed real big. What did he mean, Daddy?"

Raul replies, "I think he said 'The Red Sox did win the World Series'. It's a baseball thing, honey. The Red Sox is a baseball team that never won the World Series... until last year. It's a game that if a team wins it, they are the best in the world."

Marisol says, "He must know you, Raul."

“I don’t know anyone with white German Shepherds,” Raul replies.

“Your dad raised them... and he was a Red Sox fan. You two were always arguing about who was the best team.”

Raul says, “Come on, Marisol. Dad died before Rachel was born. You don’t think he somehow came back for a visit. It’s just someone who knows about Dad and our baseball discussions. A lot of people overheard us at the coffee shop. It’s just a coincidence about the dogs. Come on, let’s get this little one back to the cabin and in bed. It’s very late. One thing is certain... The Good Shepherd does take care of his own. We can thank God for Rachel’s safety.”

Marisol says, “Amen to that. God has blessed us for sure.”

A short distance away, Blasdon says to Michael, “He doesn’t recognize it now, but one day when he is maybe reading his Bible or walking down a street, it will come to him. He will realize God touched him in more than one way today.”

The Old Man in the Park

Visit Seventy-nine

The school councilor, Sheila Blair, says to the concerned mother, “Jacob is not doing well in his seventh grade classes, Mrs. Stevens. His teachers are concerned about his lack of concentration and effort. I’ve looked at his last year’s grades and he barely passed then and was promoted. Prior to that, his grades looked a lot better, in fact, they were excellent. I noticed that Jacob moved in from a school upstate. Do you think being the new kid has affected him or is there something else that may be affecting his grades?”

“His father passed away two years ago”, Brandy Stevens shares. “They were very close and did all the things that fathers and sons do. It hurt Jacob so much to lose his Dad. I prayed that time would heal his hurt, but it hasn’t. I try to help him with his homework, but he doesn’t seem to care... about much of anything. I don’t know what to do. We did have to move closer to his grandparents as I felt we needed the support. He wasn’t doing that well at the other school near the end of the school year.”

“That explains a lot. I’m sorry for your loss... and Jacob’s also, of course. Sometimes... doing well in some activity or at least, working at it will help an individual to cope with an event in his life like this. Does he have any interests, like sports?”

“Not really... He and his father played all the sports in season, but, like I said, he doesn’t appear interested now.”

“Well, I’ve got a meeting with Jacob this afternoon. Let me speak with him and see if I can help. We need to find a way to channel his thoughts in a different direction. He has the potential and I don’t want to see him not succeed.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Blair. I appreciate your help. I’m at a blank wall.”

Later that day, Jacob comes to Mrs. Blair’s office. She invites him to take a chair and then says, “Jacob, your teachers and I are concerned about your grades. Your records show you have the ability, but you don’t appear to be trying very hard. What do you think?”

Jacob squirms in his seat and hesitatingly replies, “I... I am trying, but I have a lot on my mind and I just don’t seem to... get it done. I’ll do better, Mrs. Blair.”

“Sometimes participating in sports helps clear our minds. Baseball is starting soon. How about trying out for the school team. Mr. Sloan is an excellent coach. Do you have a favorite position to play?”

“I’m not into sports too much. I use to play a lot with my Dad, but... well I just don’t like to anymore.”

Mrs. Blair thinks a moment and then says, “How do you feel about chess? There is a chess tournament coming up in about a month. Maybe you could enter... who knows you might be pretty good.”

“I don’t know the first thing about that game... it looks hard and you have to think too much to play it.”

Mrs. Blair says, “The Chess Club is meeting after school today. Why not drop by and see what you think? Mr. Ellis is an excellent player... he can help you, I know. The chess players will help you also. What do you think?”

Jacob hesitates and then replies, “I might look in and check it out.”

Later that afternoon, after school, Jacob enters Mr. Ellis’ classroom. He finds about ten students paired off with chessboards between them. There is a lot of conversation and activity.

Clay Ellis sees Jacob and he says, “Hello. Come in. Do you want to join us? What is your name?”

“Jacob... Jacob Stevens. I was just checking it out. I don’t know anything about chess... the moves or anything.”

“Well, we can fix that. Come in and I’ll go over the fundamentals... you’ll pick it up in no time.

Mr. Ellis was correct. He was able to teach Jacob the moves of each chess piece that afternoon. He even gave Jacob some reading material and club application to take home and bring back tomorrow.

As he was leaving, Mr. Ellis says, “There is a tournament next month at the Convention Center downtown. There are all types of skill levels and you can enter the beginner division. You’ll have a lot of fun and from what I saw today, you’ll do very well. We will be meeting every day at lunch to practice until the tournament. What do you say?”

Jacob replies, “I’ll see... Maybe. I’ll think about it.”

“Good. I believe you’ll enjoy it. It’s a great game.”

The next day after school, Jacob plays a game with Howie and they become good friends. Howie wins the game, but he gives Jacob some pointers that are helpful.

Howie says, "See that guy over there laughing? That's Norman. He and the guy beside him, Peter, are jerks. They are ninth graders and think they know everything about everything especially chess. Don't pay them any mind. They like to put others down."

As Jacob is walking home from school He cuts through the city park a couple of blocks from his house. Jacob is deep in thought as he thinks about the day's events. He played chess at lunch with Howie and he enjoyed the game even though he lost. Howie gave him some tips on openings and it helped some. He was still behind, but thought he would continue playing.

As he comes closer to the pond at the center of the park, he sees an old man at one of the tables close to the pond. The man is staring at a chessboard in deep thought as he considers his next move.

The man looks up and beckons to Jacob. He calls, "Come, son... Come play a game with me?"

For some reason, Jacob isn't frightened of the man, even though he does not usually talk strangers. He says, "I'm not good at all. I'm just a beginner."

The man replies, "That's no problem. I'll give you some help on how to best your opponent in a chess match."

Jacob knew he needed help so he says, "Okay... I can play a little while before I have to get home." He takes a seat across from the old man.

As the man sets up the playing board, Jacob takes a closer look at him. The man has gray hair under the old weatherworn hat he wears. His face has deep wrinkles and he has a salt and pepper color mustache. However, his eyes twinkle and he has an infectious smile. Jacob feels at ease and has a strange peace as he sits across from the old man.

The man says, "Jacob, my name is Michael Deal. We'll start by working on a couple of opening moves that you can practice."

Jacob doesn't remember telling the man his name, but he must have forgotten. He replies, "That's good, Mister...Deal."

Deal shows Jacob an opening and several variations of the moves that probably would take place and how to obtain an advantage over an opponent.

"Remember, Jacob, the object is to control the center squares and attempt to obtain a material advantage over your opponent... and of course, attack his king and win.

Jacob says, "It's a lot to remember."

"It is, but you'll get it. Now, you had better get home. After homework, practice the moves I showed you. Drop back tomorrow and we'll work on some other techniques. We'll look at capturing your opponent's queen, which hurts him a lot. See you tomorrow."

"So long, Mister Deal."

Jacob heads toward home. He was too embarrassed to tell Mister Deal he didn't have a chess set. "I'll practice with Howie tomorrow at noon."

When he walks into the house, his mother says, "Guess what, Jacob... You'll never believe what I got you. I was going down the street and for some reason I turned on this street and... I don't know... I parked the car in front of this store and right in the window was this... this...and it was on such a sale..."

Jacob couldn't believe his eyes. It was a chess set. Not just any old chess set, but a really nice set. "Wow! Mom! This is really great. This is a great chess set."

"The man was very nice and he even included this chess book free. He said you should practice the moves in the book and in no time you'll be a good chess player."

For the next few weeks until the tournament, Jacob and Mister Deal met in the park after school and Jacob received a terrific education in the art of chess playing. Finally, it was Friday, the day before the tournament, and Mister Deal says, "You know all that I can teach you, Jacob. It is up to you to put all that knowledge in play tomorrow. I know you'll do just fine."

"I don't know..." Jacob says.

"Well, I know. You'll do great."

Jacob asks, "Will you be there to watch me?"

Mister Deal replies, "I'll be watching... You can bet on that."

The number of players at the tournament surprised Jacob. There were entrants from all four high schools in the city, divided into three classes: Beginner, Intermediate and Expert. Jacob was the only one from his school in the Beginner class. Howie and another classmate, Jimmy, were in the Intermediate bracket and Peter and Norman were playing in the Expert class.

Norman stopped by Jacob's table and remarks "Do your best, Stevens. Don't feel too bad if you lose... this is your first tournament. No one believes you'll do too well."

Jacob replies, "Good luck to you too, Norman."

Howie stops by also. He says, "Don't mind Norman... That's just the way he is... no class." He starts to leave and he turns back and says, "Oh... I almost forgot. There was an old man in the hall that asked me to tell you to 'Win one for the Giffer' or something like that."

Jacob reaches out and grabs Howie's arm. He asks, "What did he say? Are you sure it wasn't 'Win one for the Gipper'?"

"I'm not certain... Giffer... Gipper. What's the difference? I don't know what he's talking about anyway. He just said to tell you that. What does it mean?"

"It's something that a college coach said to his team when they were getting ready to play an important football game. It means to do your best for the coach."

Howie says, "That was really nice of him to say that."

Jacob pauses a moment and then says, "Yes it was... and that was something my dad always told me when I was going to do something important; do your best. It's funny somehow that the old man would say that. Don't you think?"

It was a short tournament for every one of the players on their team except Jacob. Norman and Peter only lasted until the second round. Jimmy went out in the third round and Howie lasted until the fourth. Mister Ellis asked the other team members to stay around and support Jacob as he continued to win his matches. Norman and Peter weren't too happy, but they stayed.

The championship match in the Beginner bracket was between Jacob and a young man named Terrance Chambers from a rival school. Jacob played the white pieces and opened with the Ruy Lopez opening. He developed his knight and bishop aggressively and kept Terrance from castling, a good defensive maneuver. This left Terrance's king in an exposed position.

Jacob thought a long time before his next move and after he made it, Norman poked Peter in the ribs with his elbow. He says, "Stevens messed up that time. He's going to lose his queen."

And he was right... Terrance didn't waste any time taking Jacob's queen, which made him feel confident about his chances of winning the game.

That feeling was short-lived however. Jacob immediately moves his knight and quietly says, "Check mate." Terrance had been so eager to grab the offered queen of Jacob that he overlooked the plight of his king. Jacob had won the beginning bracket

championship in his first tournament. Jacob would become somewhat of a hero around school as his trophy was the first and only trophy the chess club had ever won.

“That was very impressive, Jacob,” Mister Ellis remarks as they walk to Mister Ellis car. “That queen sacrifice was excellent. That took a lot of courage to pull off. Where did you learn to play so well in such a short period of time?”

“A guy in the park gave me some lessons. He really knew his chess.”

Mister Ellis rubs his chin and then says, “That’s funny... I learned from an old man in the park when I was about twelve. Had an old hat and mustache and a funny way of pointing his finger at you when you made a bad move.”

“That’s Mister Deal all right. He’s a funny guy, but really good.”

“Deal?” Mister Ellis remarks with a distant look in his eyes. “Deal... That was his name. I had forgotten, but that’s what it was alright.”

Jacob looks around and then says, “I was hoping I would see him after the match. I wanted to thank him for his help. Have you seen him?”

“No and I don’t believe we will,” Mister Ellis says. “Mister Deal died about twenty years ago. I know... I went to the funeral.”

Jacob is baffled as he says, “How can that be? The Mister Deal that helped me was not dead. How is that possible?”

Mister Ellis says, “I don’t know, Jacob. Maybe God wanted Mister Deal to come for a visit and help another young man learn some valuable lessons about himself and how to play chess.”

**Listen to advise and accept instruction,
And in the end you will be wise.
Proverbs 19:20 NIV**

God’s touch is sometimes subtle and barely noticeable.

The Faithful Santa

Visit Eighty – A Christmas Story

It is two Sundays before Christmas and the pastor of the Wildwood Church makes the usual invitation at the close of the service. The choir is singing a familiar hymn, “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”. Pastor Gordon sees a portly gentlemen with a white beard and old pinch-nosed spectacles step into the aisle and come toward him.

Pastor Gordon asks, “How can I help you?”

The man replies, “I would like to join your church, Pastor.”

“What is your name?”

“Kris. Kris Clemeths.”

Pastor Gordon puts his hand over his mouth to cover his grin. “Kris, I bet you have had plenty of comments about your appearance and name, especially during this time of year.”

“You’re correct, Pastor. I’ve gotten use to it however.”

“Kris, have you asked Jesus into your heart and do you know that when you pass from this world that you will be with Him in heaven”

“Yes, Pastor, I really do... I do know Jesus.”

Shirley tries to be upbeat as she tells her children, “Brian, Paula, you know since your Daddy went to be with Jesus, money has been scarce. I’m afraid I won’t be able to afford any presents for you this year.” She brings them into her arms and continues, “But your Aunt Mary told me about this church over on McCarty Street... you know the one named Wildwood. Well, there is a special Christmas Eve service where they give gifts to children in the neighborhood.”

Brian, her six-year-old, asks, “But, Mom, what about my electric train? You said I would get it for Christmas.”

Her five-year-old daughter, Paula, interrupts, “Mommy, my dolly... you said Santa would bring me my dolly. We didn’t get to talk to Santa yet. Maybe we can go to the Mall and see Santa. I bet he would bring what we asked for.”

“Kids, kids... I don’t know... let’s just wait and see... I don’t think Santa can help our situation. I can’t promise anything, but... the Bible says that we can pray and ask God for anything and if it is His will, he will give it to us. We know that God loves us and wants the best for us, so we can ask him for the special presents you want.”

Paula says, "I think God wants me to have my dolly."

Brian says, "And I know God wants me to have my electric train set."

Shirley breathes a prayer, "Lord, I hope you do."

It is Tuesday and Pastor Gordon is busy in his office, working on his sermon when he feels the presence of someone nearby. He looks up to see a recent new member standing in front of his desk. He says, "Hello... Kris... isn't it? How can I help you?"

Kris replies, "Well, Pastor, God has been so good to me and I want to give back to him for all he has done for me. I understand you need a bus driver for the children's ministry and I was wondering if you would let me drive the children to church."

"Well... we do need a driver. Have you had any experience?"

Kris replies, "Yes, I've had plenty of experience driving."

Pastor Gordon says, "That's great... Go back to the secretary's desk down the hall and ask Mary for an application. We'll have to do a background check and if everything is okay, you can start Sunday. Mike Perry is over that ministry and you can get your instructions and route from him. I appreciate you volunteering... it is very important to reach these children. By the way, we have a special Christmas Eve service where we give out presents that the members have purchased to needy children that we bus to the church. Can you drive a week from Friday to pick up the children?"

"Yes, I can... I'm looking forward to it."

It is Friday evening and Shirley is standing at the street corner with Brian and Paula, waiting for the bus. She says, "I have to go to work now, but the bus will take you to the church. Aunt Mary will be here when you return."

Paula says, "I wish you would come with us, Mommy."

"I wish I could too, but I have to work when they want me. We need the money. Now, you hold on to Brian's hand and listen to the bus driver and say 'thank you' when they give you your gift... Oh, here's the bus now."

The bus stops at the curb and the door swings open. Kris says, "Hello, kids... Come on... get on my bus. Let's go to church."

Paula exclaims, "Santa! Look, Mommy! It's Santa!"

Brian says, "Don't be silly, Paula. He's not Santa... He's just a bus driver."

Paula says, "Well, he looks like Santa to me."

"Hurry, kids," Shirley interrupts. "The driver is waiting. Now... do what he says. Have a good time and I'll see you later. I'll come in and kiss you goodnight. 'Bye... I love you."

"Love you too, Mom... Love you, Mommy!"

Brian and Paula get onto the bus and Paula says, "Let's sit behind Santa."

"He's not Santa, Paula."

As Kris pulls from the curb he speaks over his shoulder, "You kids looking forward to those presents? Do you have anything special you are wanting?"

Brian replies, "Yes, we want something special... Fat chance of that."

Kris asks, "Why do you say that; Brian?"

"How do you know my name?"

"Huh... I believe I heard your mother say it. Why don't you think you'll get what you want for Christmas?"

"What I want costs too much. Nobody is going to spend that much on some kid they don't know."

"You've got to believe, Brian. God says if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, it will be done. I know, if you really believe, you'll get that train."

"How did you know I want a electric train for Christmas? I didn't say what I wanted for Christmas."

Kris pauses a moment and then replies, "It must have been on the note your mother sent to the church."

The bus arrives at the church parking lot. Kris parks at the bus stop and assists the children from the bus. As Paula and Brian depart the bus, Paula asks, "Santa, will you pray with us and ask God for our gifts?"

Kris gets off the bus, he puts his big arms around the two children and prays, "Lord God, thank you for your love for us. Lord, these two little ones have asked for special presents this year. If it is your will, I know you will let them have the gifts. We sure hope you do, because they want them more than anything. Amen."

Brian looks up at the old man, grins and then says, "Thanks... Santa."

Kris watches the two children walk hand in hand toward the entrance to the church. He prays, "Lord, I hope it all works out."

The children are treated to birthday cake and ice cream celebrating Jesus' birthday. Pastor Gordon tells the familiar story of that first Christmas and a number of carols are sung.

Finally, the anticipated time arrives. The Christmas tree at the front is surrounded by mounds of holiday wrapped presents. Each child goes to the front and gets their present. They go to the adjoining reception hall to have plenty of room to open their gift.

Brian and Paula anxiously wait their turn. When it arrives, they both go to the front and they receive their presents. Paula is very excited, but Brian is downhearted. He knows the small package he received isn't his expected gift.

When they get to the reception hall, Paula rips into her package. She exclaims as she takes off the lid, "Oh! Cool! It's my doll! It's what I asked for! Look, Brian!"

"That's swell, Paula... I'm glad."

Paula asks, "What did you get? You haven't even opened your gift, Brian! Open it up!"

"This little box... it isn't what I asked for."

"Maybe not, but it is probably something really, really special. Open it up."

"Oh, okay..." Brian removes the wrapping and opens the lid. "What's this? It's a piece of paper... It says to go to the kitchen area for my present."

The two children walk to the kitchen door and a lady in a red dress takes the note from Brian. She leaves and soon returns with a large package. Brian takes the package and is hardly able to carry it to an open space. He rips the paper from the box and exclaims, "It's my train! It has everything... track and everything. Wow!"

"Can I help you carry your presents to the bus?" Kris has been watching and has approached the children.

He helps them get their presents on the bus and he loads the other kids. Soon he has delivered all the children except Brian and Kris. They arrive at the corner and Kris helps them get their presents off the bus and loaded into Aunt Mary's car.

As they start to get in the car, Paula hugs Kris and exclaims, "Thank you, Santa, for my dolly. It's perfect and just what I wanted."

Kris says, "God answered our prayers, Paula. We believed and it happened just like the Bible says."

Brian says, "Kris, you showed us what faith means. I believe you are an angel, a Christmas angel. "

"Why do you say that, Brian?"

"You know too much about us to not be either Santa or an angel. You knew my name and Mom hadn't mentioned it. And she didn't send a note to the church; she just called and told them to pick up two kids at this corner. She didn't know I was listening. How did you know so much about us?"

Kris thinks a moment and then replies, "Well, Santa does know a lot about children. I guess you could say I'm a Santa. You kids have a Merry Christmas."

As Kris turns and starts to get back on his bus, Brian calls from the car, "Merry Christmas yourself, Kris... Kris, ... tell Dad we love him."

Kris smiles. He waves to the children and ascends the bus steps. After he takes his seat, he speaks to a young man who has come from the back of the bus and has taken a front seat, "I guess you heard."

The young man replies, "Yes, Kris. Thank you for letting me visit with you."

You can thank Jesus; he made it possible. We had better get home... The celebration has started already."

The two visitors step across dimensions to join heaven's multitudes singing praises to their Lord and King.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:17

Inspired by the true story included in Tommy Barnett's book entitled **Dream Again**, where another young boy received an impossible train wish one Christmas.

Cutter's Christmas

Visit Eighty-One – A Christmas Story

The rugged, weathered-skinned cowboy is slouched in the wooden chair across the desk from the neatly dressed foreman, Gordan Brooks. Brooks is visibly upset.

Brooks grits his teeth as he spits the words at the older employee, “You aren’t getting any advance, Cutter. You’ve already got a tab of two thousand dollars. You only make eight hundred a month and it will take you quite a while to pay that back. You want another five hundred and I just can’t do it.”

Sam Cutter says, “Mister Brooks, I need the money to get my wife moved here before Christmas. It’s only a week away and I’d like to have her with me.”

“Cutter, you’ve only worked for us a couple of months and you’re not from around here. I can’t take a chance on you taking off with that money. No! I’m sorry, but that’s that. Now get back to work.”

Cutter slowly unfolds his lanky frame out of his chair and leaves the office. As he shuts the door and turns, he is startled to see Kathy Simmons, the owner’s daughter, standing next to the kitchen door a few feet away. She says, “Brooks is a little gruff sometimes, Mister Cutter. I’m Sorry... I overheard your conversation. Where is Mrs. Cutter?”

“At Carson... She’s living with her sister until I can get us a place. There’s a house for rent down the road apiece. The five hundred would cover the deposit and first month rent and transportation for Melissa.”

“What about that two thousand dollars? What was that all about?”

“Right after I got here, Melissa got sick and went to the hospital. The doctor and hospital were expensive.”

“And Brooks just advanced you the money?”

“Well, he took my old pickup in exchange and I’m going to pay him back out of my wages.”

Brooks opens the door and sees Cutter. He says, “You got business here, Cutter? If not, get to work. You haven’t put in a full day since you started here. Move it or hit the road.” He notices the owner’s daughter and says, “Morning, Miss Kathy. Is this cowboy bothering you?”

Kathy replies, “Not at all, Mister Brooks... not at all.” To Cutter she says, “Take care, Mister Cutter. See you later.”

“Yes ma’am. Good day.”

The wind is whistling through the pine trees and large snowflakes are beginning to fall. It is early afternoon on Christmas Eve in this mountainous area twenty miles west of the town of Drake. A horseman is riding easily on an Appaloosa along the valley floor. Cutter is traveling up to the ridgeline searching for stray calves that were separated from their mothers when he moved the herd closer to the ranch house this morning. With the bad weather moving in, it will be easier to feed the herd.

Sam is the only cowboy working today. The others have been given Christmas Eve and Christmas Day off to be with their families. Since he is the newest employee and has no family locally, Sam draws this job. When he locates this last calf, his day is done and he can get to the bunkhouse and get warm. The forecast is for bad weather moving in tonight. It will be a white Christmas this year.

Cutter’s wrinkled skin reflects the affects of summer wind and sun and the cold hard winters associated with this tough, outdoor occupation. He guides his horse onto the shoulder of the interstate highway that cuts through the Simmons ranch. Cutter has a good view down the steep rocky slopes to the valley below. This area is densely populated with thick brambles and briars that can hide even the largest calves.

He pulls the collar of his heavy coat up around his neck in an attempt of fighting off the biting wind. Cutter speaks out loud, “Lord, it’s getting cold. Help me find that pesky calf. I know we saw her head this way. And help me, Lord, to find a way to bring Melissa here. I miss her so. Thank you, Lord.”

Cutter arrives at a sharp curve in the highway. He dismounts and goes to the edge next to the guardrail. He scans the steep slope below looking for the wandering calf.

He is deep in thought, trying to figure out where that illusive critter might be. He is startled to hear the distinct voice of a girl, “Watch out, Mister Cutter!”

He turns and throws his arms over his face as a large mountain lion leaps out of nowhere toward him. Cutter staggers back and his legs hit the guardrail. He tumbles backward down the steep slope through the brambles and brush. He falls head over heels

as he bumps and skids halfway to the bottom. His fall is stopped by a soft collision with a large cedar tree. Cutter jumps to his feet and frantically looks around trying to find the lion. He is perplexed when he can't find the vicious wild animal. It seemed to him that the lion's leaping attack should have resulted in his fall down the mountain with Sam. After thinking about the events, he realizes that the lion didn't actually hit him, but Sam just reacted and fell over the guardrail.

Cutter looks up toward the top of the ridge where he had been standing. He is surprised to see a young girl, maybe eight or nine years old, standing next to the guardrail looking down at him. She is dressed in a white dress and next to her is the mountain lion who snarls at Sam.

The brown haired girl points to her left, Cutter's right. Cutter looks to where she is pointing and notices a suitcase barely visible beneath some dense bramble bushes. This suitcase couldn't be seen from the highway above and Cutter wonders how the girl knew where it was. He looks up again to where she was standing, but the girl and lion are gone. He pulls the suitcase from its hiding place.

Cutter takes his handkerchief and ties the handle of the suitcase to his belt. It is very heavy and Sam struggles as he climbs slowly back to the top. He is exhausted as he pulls himself over the guardrail and sits on the ground trying to catch his breath and get his strength back. His horse is standing patiently waiting for Sam. Cutter remarks, "Mel, did you see a girl and lion? I guess not... you would of took off if you saw that lion. I must be cracking up... seeing things, you know."

He looks down the road and sees a pickup truck heading his way. It pulls over to the shoulder of the road and a tall, young man wearing a parka gets out. Cutter recognizes the young man as Bill Warner, the deputy sheriff of the county. Warner goes to the same church as Cutter over at the crossroads to the west.

Warner asks, "What ya doing, Cutter? You fall off your horse or something?" He chuckles at his joke.

"No, funny man... I... kind of fell down the ravine and had to climb out." Sam pauses a moment and then asks, "You probably think I'm crazy, but did you know of or maybe you have a report about a mountain lion and... and... a little brown-haired girl about eight or nine? Maybe you know of them around about... you know, girl and her pet lion."

"Cutter, did you hit your head when you fell? I know you're no drinking man... But a girl and a pet mountain lion? You want me to drive you to a doctor?"

"I don't need no doctor. I know what I saw and I saw a lion and he jumped at me and I fell over the side. And I saw this young girl too." Cutter gets to his feet and continues, "I've got to find a missing calf then I'm going back to the ranch, take a hot bath and go to bed. I'm bushed."

Warner says, "That's what I wanted to tell you... I found your calf down the road a bit and she's in the back of my pickup. Tie your horse on the back and I'll give you a ride back to the ranch. You can pay me with a cup of coffee." He notices the suitcase and asks, "What's that there, Cutter? You taking a trip?"

"Naw... I think it belongs to... that little girl." He notices the grin on Warner's face. "I know I saw a girl... anyway, she pointed to where this suitcase was...kind of hidden like... down the mountain side.

Warner exclaims, "Wait a minute! Man, I remember something about a suitcase!"

"What are you raving about, Bill?"

"It was last year about this time... There was this bank robbery in Drake and the crooks made a break for it up this highway. We were trying to catch them, but they had a fast car. They came to this turn and collided head on with another car. Both vehicles went over the side, rolled down the mountain hit the bottom and burst into flames. All were killed. It was a terrible wreck... Besides the two robbers being killed there was also a mother and daughter in the other car. It was a sad time around here. The Lamberts were loved and well known and very active in our church. The pastor did a great job at the funeral."

Cutter interrupts, "Wait a minute... Lambert... Lambert... Didn't the pastor say something about keeping Lambert... Barry Lambert on the prayer list and something about taking up a collection for him?"

"Yes... Barry's had a hard year... must seem like twenty years to him. He lost his wife and little girl and he took it real, real hard... I probably would of too if it had happened to me. Now he's about to lose his farm too."

"Why's that?"

"Barry's been... despondent, I think they call it, and not doing much work at the farm. He didn't have any insurance on the girls and had to borrow money for the funerals... you know how much those things cost. He's in debt about \$10,000 dollars and the creditor is going to take the farm and sell it at auction."

"Who's the creditor?"

"Your boss, Ted Simmons... actually, it's the foreman, Brooks, that is pushing this. Mister Simmons is hardly here with other business taking up much of his time and he leaves the ranch running to Brooks and his daughter... mostly Brooks. Brooks is not a patient man. He gave Barry ten more days to come up with the money or he's taking the farm. Actually, I'll have to be the one and I'm not looking forward to it."

"What's all this got to do with this suitcase?"

“The witnesses said the robbers put the bank money in a suitcase. It never was found after the wreck. It was assumed that the money was burned up and gone. The insurance company put out a reward just in case, but no one came forward.”

“You think this is the one?”

“Got to be... It probably fell out of the car on the way down and landed in the brush. Put it up here on the hood and let’s see.”

After Warner opens the suitcase he exclaims, “Wow! I ain’t never seen so much money in one place before. Ain’t it pretty?”

“I never considered money as being pretty. What do we do now?”

“I’ll take it into Drake and get the banker out of his Christmas Eve celebration and give him his money. Come on, Cutter. I’ll drop you off at the ranch on the way. Let’s go, man!”

As they are racing down the road, Cutter asks, “How old was Lambert’s daughter?”

“She was ten... I know what you’re thinking, Cutter. Yes, she had brown hair. I know you. You think Jeannie came back from heaven to show you where this suitcase was hidden? Man, that’s crazy... you’re crazy. You didn’t see no lion or girl. Think about it, Cutter. You’re entitled to that reward. I think it’s \$25,000 and that’s a lot of money. You’re a rich man, Cutter.”

“It don’t belong to me, Warner. I wouldn’t have found that suitcase without that little girl. I know she wants that money to go to her father.”

“Cutter, you need that money too. Don’t forget your wife...don’t forget Melissa. And don’t forget you’ve got debts too.”

When they arrive at the Simmons’ ranch house, Kathy is standing on the front porch. Before she can say anything, Warner yells to her, “Try talking some sense into this crazy man, Kathy. I’ve got to get to town with this suitcase. Cutter found the First National Bank heist money.” Cutter gets out of the pickup and Warner speeds down the road toward town.

Kathy asks, “What’s all that about, Cutter? Why are you crazy?”

“That’s Warner’s opinion. He thinks I should take some reward for finding that stolen money.”

“And you don’t?”

“I think it belongs to Lambert. His wife and daughter kind of stopped those crooks... in a manner of speaking. Therefore, it belongs to him... not me. I just followed directions to where it was hidden. Besides it sounds like he needs it to pay you off.”

“What do you mean... pay me off?”

“This ranch holds a mortgage on Lambert’s farm. I believe Brooks gave Lambert until the first of the year to come up with ten thousand dollars.”

“I didn’t know... But believe me I’ll take care of Mister Brooks. Cutter, there is a surprise for you in the living room. I’ll be right back. I need to talk to our foreman. It sounds like we need to ask Mister Brooks to move on.”

Cutter walks into the living room. He exclaims, “Melissa!”

Cutter and his wife embrace and kiss. Melissa says, “It’s been too long, Cowboy.”

“How did this happen? I didn’t get the money to send for you.”

“Miss Kathy did it... She sent the money for me to get here and you know what?” She continues when Cutter shakes his head, “She bought a house for us down the way... paid the whole thing and said we can pay her back over time. We’ve got a home, Sam.”

Cutter says, “This is the best Christmas ever... God is so good.”

In the space between here and there, Jesus is kneeling and Jeannie is behind him with her arms around his neck. They watch as Cutter and Melissa are talking. Jeannie asks, “How did you know Mister Cutter wouldn’t keep the reward money, Jesus?”

We have been friends for a long, long time. I knew what my friend would do.”

The Heart of a Child

Visit Eighty-two – #1 Kingdom of Heaven Series



As Dillon experiences the expanse and beauty of heaven for the first time, his heart overflows with joy. It is too huge and too beautiful to describe so he just enjoys and fills his soul with the sweet fragrance of love that permeates every cell that makes up what is known as Dillon. This love is nothing he created, earned or purchased, but was given to him as a gift by his Creator because of a choice Dillon made so many earth-years ago. And it is a pure, holy love that only God possesses and not the tainted, self-indulgent type that His children have fashioned from selfish desires and lustful imagination. Love was only a seed that God planted in the heart of a re-born child that reached upward from the dirt and gloom of the world for his Father's hand. This seed has been properly nourished and weeded by God's Spirit and is now blooming in the warm light of heaven's Son-shine of grace and mercy.

The peace Dillon feels is difficult to explain. There is no concern, no fear, no stress, no feeling of unfulfilled expectations; he feels at ease, protected, relaxed and whole. This is what Dillon has longed for ever since he was created and placed in the world. He knew something was missing, but he couldn't quite figure out what it was, until now. Dillon is back home.

When he arrived, Dillon placed the heavy load he had carried as a weary traveler at God's feet; he has been healed of the many battle wounds accumulated over time; his scars have been wiped away by Jesus' gentle touch and he shed the loneliness and fear of

a lost child as Dillon allowed God's strong embrace to gather him into His heart. The prodigal has returned home to the Father.

Time had been the one thing in the world that was a problem for Dillon. There had never been enough time, even though he had been granted eighty-nine years of earth-time.

Now that Dillon had been called home and was carried across the boundary between there and here by the death angel, he didn't worry about time; it was endless. He will play and run across the vast hills and valleys of heaven forever. The complex mysteries of the universe will be revealed and he will enjoy endless discussions with other souls in this beautiful and peaceful place. And best of all, his heart will be forever filled with the joy and peace of the ever-abiding presence of his Lord, Jesus.

It is a beautiful, sunny day in heaven and Dillon is hunting for flowers to give to his new friend, Katy. He is walking in a heavily wooded area, looking for the prettiest of the beautiful red, wild flowers that grow along the path. Katy loves the color of red.

Two squirrels playing chase in the tall trees distract Dillon. He laughs as he watches their happy play. They scamper along the branches and leap from one tall oak tree to another. At times, it is difficult to locate them, because they are so fast and elusive.

He lays the accumulated flowers beside the path and he wanders into the heavy undergrowth as he follows the interesting chase scene high in the trees. This is too good to miss.

Dillon is so engrossed in the squirrel's play that he doesn't realize how far he has traveled from the forest path. Finally, he looks around and remarks, "Where am I?"

Jesus says to Blasdon, "You should find my friend, Dillon. He needs you."

Blasdon replies, "I know, Lord, but Dillon is difficult to locate. He is very elusive and wanders very far sometimes."

"I know, my friend. But remember he was confined to a bed and wheelchair the last few years and was a prisoner within himself. He is so happy to be free and able to run like the deer and to experience eternity and the many adventures since he came home. Please locate him for me. I miss him."

Dillon tries to find the familiar path, but the harder he tries, the further he travels into the dense forest. He becomes frustrated and he is beginning to become frightened. What if he cannot find his way to Jesus? Why did he wander away from familiar ground?

Out of the corner of his eye, he notices movement. He turns to see a black butterfly with white markings flitting from one flower to another as it makes its way toward Dillon. He watches the spastic flight of the butterfly as it approaches him.

The butterfly's flight continues until it reaches Dillon and lands on his chest. Dillon looks down at the butterfly and wonders what he should do now.

The butterfly takes off again and Dillon watches as it travels a short distance and then returns to him as if to say, 'follow me'. Dillon does start to follow as the butterfly continues its flight flying ever so slow and returning often so Dillon can keep up.

They continue their mutual journey until they locate the misplaced forest path, but Dillon still has a problem; which direction is the correct way to go? Should he go to the left that travels downward and would be easier to travel or to the right that appears to be more dense and difficult. He starts to the left, but the butterfly immediately blocks his path and hovers right in front of his face. Dillon says, "Okay, I get the message. I'll go the other way. You lead the way."

After a short distance, they come to a fork in the path. Immediately, the butterfly takes the path to the right and Dillon follows.

They come to a sharp turn to the left and Dillon loses sight of the butterfly. He hurries to catch up, but as he makes the turn, he cannot locate the butterfly. Dillon does see a bright light ahead and he runs toward it.

As he bursts from the dense forest into the bright light of the pasture, he feels the presence of love in his heart and he knows Jesus is near. Dillon sees Jesus kneeling down in the tall green grass a short distance away. Dillon runs toward his Savior and when he arrives, he says, "Jesus, a butterfly helped me find my way out of the forest, but I lost him. Do you know where he is?"

Jesus replies, "Yes, my child, here he is."

Then Dillon notices the cupped hands of Jesus. Dillon places his hands on Jesus' and opens His hands. There is the missing butterfly resting in the safe haven of Jesus' hands. Dillon looks up into the radiant face of his Lord. Jesus says, "I asked Blasdon to find you and bring you back to me. He has to go now on another mission, but he'll be back soon." With that, the butterfly takes flight and disappears into the bright light above.

Jesus reaches out and takes Dillon's face in his hands. He says, "Remember, my child, that when you accepted my love and trusted your life to me, that you can never be lost nor taken from my hands. I'll always be with you and you'll always be safe close to

my heart. Because of your childlike faith, your heart was changed so you could enter the kingdom of heaven. We'll always be together to share heaven's adventures.

**And he said, "I tell you the truth,
unless you change and become like little children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child
will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 18:3 NIV**



Inspired by the time God sent a black butterfly with white markings to help me find my way in the forest at Brownwood State Park.

Christmas Message

Visit Eighty-five – A Christmas Story

Hampton is looking forward to Christmas. He and his wife, Diane, are expecting their son, Erick, to get home from serving overseas in Germany with the Army. Erick will be arriving tomorrow which will be Christmas Eve, with his wife, Shirley and daughter, Marie. They are anxious to see their six-year-old granddaughter. It will be a happy Christmas this year. It has been two years since they have been together.

Hampton calls from the attic, “Diane , do you want the box with the snowmen?”

“Yes... I’ll put them in the guest bathroom... Honey, grab the green box that has the stuffed cloth nativity. I’ll put those in Marie’s room. She always likes to play with them...especially Mary riding on the donkey.”

“I thought we had all the Christmas decorations down from up here already.”

Diane replies, “I didn’t get them all down until I heard that Erick was coming home for Christmas. We have them all now.”

Hampton finishes retrieving the decorations and Diane completes the placement of the treasures in their respective places. She prepares a pot of coffee and the couple relax in the den to watch the late news.

He remarks, “It gets no better than this, Babe. I can’t wait for the kids to get here.”

Diane says, “It is going to be a happy time.”

Before the news is over, Hampton falls asleep on the couch. Diane is sitting in her chair reading a book.

Hampton is walking down the road that has a white rail fence running beside it. He looks over the fence and sees a boy holding a rabbit. The boy is brushing the rabbit’s teeth with a toothbrush.

Then Hampton sees a young girl painting a donkey’s hooves with red nail polish. The girl looks familiar to Hampton.



“Wake up, Honey! You’re going to get a crick in your neck sleeping upright like that. Let’s go to bed.”

Hampton rubs his eyes and stretches. He replies, “You know, Babe... I had a dream just now. It was weird.”

“Most dreams are weird... I’ve had some doozies.”

“Yes, I know... me too. This one is weird because I remember it so vividly.

There was a boy with a rabbit and a girl and a donkey... and the girl was painting the donkey’s hooves. The boy was brushing the rabbit’s teeth. That girl looked so much like my sister... when we were little and lived at the children’s home in Waco.”

“You had a dream about Dawn? It’s been a long time since you mentioned her. What’s it been? Has it been thirty, thirty-five years since you saw her?”

“I guess it’s been thirty-six... she was younger and was adopted by a family from somewhere up north. I never was adopted.”

“And when you left the Home, Dad gave you a job and taught you the business.”

“Yes... and later he made me a partner and he introduced me to Jesus. Of course, he also gave you away... to me. I owe your father a lot.”

Hampton continues, “I went back to the Home and got Dawn’s adopted family’s address. I contacted them and found out that she had run away and they didn’t know where she was.”

“Well, I pray that you’ll find her eventually.”

“I hope she’s still alive. That girl in my dream sure looked like Dawn... you don’t think God is giving me a message that Dawn’s with Him in heaven.”

“No, I don’t... You have to have faith, Hamp’. I really believe you’ll find Dawn someday.”

“You always boost my spirits, Honey. Let’s go to bed. The kids will be here tomorrow morning. It’ll be a great Christmas.”

Hampton is floating down a creek on the back of a turtle. He looks toward the bank and sees the same boy with the rabbit. The boy is holding a pair of clippers and looks like he will cut the rabbits hair. The girl is using large rollers to curl the donkey’s hair.

Hampton hears Diane yelling, “Hampton! Hampton! Wake Up! You’re shouting Dawn’s name over and over.”



Hampton awakens and says, "Sorry, Babe... Another one of those crazy dreams. Maybe Dawn has a beauty shop or something. Those weird dreams have a lot of beauty shop stuff in them."

"Could be, but how are you going to find her shop? You don't know her name or anything."

"I don't know. I think the dreams are full of clues, but I don't get it."

"Well, it's late... Go back to sleep and we'll see in the morning. Remember the kids are coming tomorrow. Goodnight, Hamp'."

The next morning Erick and his family arrive to a joyous greeting. After they get caught up on everything that has transpired in the lives of both families, Erick asks his father, "Dad, do you know of a good vet?"

Hampton replies, "Yes... When we had pets, we took them to Doctor Johnson... You remember him, don't you?"

"Yes... good doctor. Well, we need to take Marie's rabbit, Fluffy, to get her teeth trimmed."

"What are you talking about? A rabbit needs his teeth trimmed?"

"This breed does... their teeth don't meet and if you don't trim them, the teeth will grow into their head and kill them. I forgot about Fluffy and his teeth look terrible. I hoped we could get it done today... Do you think anyone will be open today?"

"I'll check with Doc Johnson's office and see."

Hampton puts down the phone and says, "Doc Johnson is closed, but I have a list of 'backup' vets he left on his phone. We need to look up the addresses and pick one."

Diane gets the phone directory and looks up the names of the veterinarians. She calls out the addresses, Main Street, Young Drive, Preston Street, Turtle Creek Circle...

Hampton calls out, "Wait! Did you say 'Turtle Creek'?"

"Yes, Hamp', Is there something about that address?"

"It was in my dream about Dawn."

Erick asks, "Dream? What dream? Did you say something about Aunt Dawn? Have you heard from her?"

Hampton replies, "In a way... I had a couple of dreams recently and I believe there's a message about her."

"A message? Dad, you don't believe God is trying to give you a message about your missing sister do you?"

"I do... I believe I do." He asks Diane, "What is the name of the vet?"

Diane replies, "All it says is 'Key Animal Clinic and Salon'."

"Okay everyone, let's take Fluffy to the 'Key Animal Clinic and Salon'."

They pile into Hampton's SUV and drive to the clinic. When they arrive, Hampton notices the sign advertising the business has pictures of a donkey and a rabbit included with the usual dog and cat pictures. The donkey has rollers in its hair.

After they go inside, Hampton asks the receptionist the name of the owner. The young lady replies, "Doctor Key, but he's not available. Can I help you?"

"My son's rabbit, Fluffy, needs his teeth trimmed. Can you take care of him?"

"Yes... Just a minute. I'll get someone to help you. Please take a seat."

They don't have to wait long. A lady with a white jacket comes from the back room and approaches them. When she gets closer, Hampton notices her name tag as 'D. Key'. She says, "I understand you have a rabbit that needs a little trim."

Hampton asks, "Dawn? Are you Dawn?"

"Now, no jokes... Yes, it's Dawn Key and I've heard all the remarks about donkeys and all that. That's the purpose of the donkey on our sign outside. It's a little joke of my husband. His name is Don... Don Key and Dawn Key. Pretty funny, right?"

"Dawn! It's Hampton... Don't you recognize me?"

Dawn is taken back. She stammers, "Hampton? It is you! Oh my, I didn't know where you were. I ran away from my adoptive parents and when I finally got my act together and tried to contact the Home, no one knew your whereabouts. They thought you joined the service and was overseas somewhere. I can't believe it's you! I'm so glad to find you..." The two siblings embrace for a long time. Dawn asks, "How did you find me? Just an accident or what?"

"I know it sounds crazy, but I got a message in two dreams about you." Hampton sees Dawn smile and he continues, "I told you it was crazy, but that's how I found you. There was a young boy with a rabbit and a girl with a donkey. All the clues about you were there... she even looked like you when we were kids at the Home."

Dawn says, "I don't think that sounds crazy." She asks, "Do you remember Momma Mary?"

“Sure... She was our Group Mother at the home. What about her?”

“Don’t you remember? Everyone said I looked like her childhood pictures that were in her room. I had a dream about her last night. That’s why I smiled when you told about your dreams.”

“Oh yes... I remember. You did look a lot like her. Wait a minute! Wasn’t there a man by the name of Mister Joseph that had a farm next to the Home?”

“Yes! And he had rabbits... Remember? He let us play with them and he was so nice.”

“I remember. Also I remember Mister Joseph and Momma Mary were always telling me that I needed Jesus in my heart.

“Me too! Those two helped me make it through some tough times.”

Hampton says, “Well, I think they helped this year to bring us together again. This is a very, very special Christmas.”

Dawn says, “Yes, it is special. God gave us a special gift. He gave us... us.”

Christmas Lights

Visit Eighty-six



Tony is sitting on a bench next to the playground swings at the city park. He is watching his six-year-old daughter, Rebecca, playing with her friend, Contessa. Tony and Contessa's great-grandmother, Mary Gonzales, walked the two blocks to the park so the girls would have a place to play. Mary takes care of Rebecca during the week when Tony is at work.

Mary remarks, "I can't get over how much Rebecca looks like her mother. That long brown hair and those green eyes remind me so much of Robin."

"Yes... she is a carbon copy of her mother all right. It's not just her looks... it's some of her actions that remind me of... Robin."

Mary touches Tony on the arm and says, "I know. It's been hard on you. How long has it been?"

"It will be three years next month... January twelfth... when the accident happened. It seems like only yesterday and I so wish it was the day before yesterday and I could change things...you know."

"We all wish that, Tony. We don't know why things like this happens, but it does and we won't know until we get to Heaven." Mary looks toward the girls to see if they are all right. She continues, "It was fortunate that Rebecca was at our house and not with Robin in the car. It was a bad wreck. Does Rebecca miss her mother?"

“Oh, yes. You know at night... When I tuck her in at night. Rebecca is always asking about her mother... like what she wore... things like that. I let her play with Robin’s things; jewelry, clothes, hats... stuff she liked... you know. I think it helps Rebecca... kind of know her mother a little.”

Mary says, “I’m sure it helps, Tony.” She continues after a moment, “Are you seeing anyone now... Are you dating?”

“Nah... I did try... You know... my friends tried to fix me up with dates and stuff, but it just didn’t work. I guess I keep comparing girls with Robin... and that’s not fair to them. Besides, I have the little carbon copy over there that lights up my life.”

“Oh! The word *lights* reminds me... You know...Christmas lights. What are you getting Rebecca for Christmas? It’s getting pretty close you know.”

“I don’t know... Work hasn’t been too good this year and I’m not getting the overtime I did before. We really don’t have any extra money to spend right now. You know how it is. Rebecca has shown me some things she wants, but everything is so expensive. I should look for an extra job, but there may not be enough time now.”

Mary thinks a moment and then says, “There may be... Have you checked with Mister McDonald at church?”

“Why? How can he help?”

“People in and outside the church contact him when they have open jobs or need part-time help. He has a lot of contacts. He helped my son, Thomas, find a good job.”

“I guess it wouldn’t hurt to check. Thanks, Mary. I’ll check with him tomorrow. We’ve got to go now... I promised Rebecca we’d go see that new Christmas movie this afternoon.”

Tony and Rebecca hurry to catch Jamie Robinson before she leaves in her car after church. He says, “Sorry to bother you, Jamie. You might not remember me, but we met this morning in class. I’m Tony and this is my daughter, Rebecca. Mister McDonald told me you some help with a project. I could use some extra work for Christmas and I’ll do a good job.”

“Tony! Sure I remember you. Yes. I can use some help. Do you have any plans for lunch? My son, Rob, and I are going to Buzzy Burgers down the street. Come with us and we’ll discuss while eating. I’m starved.”

Tony looks at Rebecca and she smiles and nods. He replies, “That’s one of Rebecca’s favorite places. Sounds good. We’ll meet you there.”

Jamie puts her hamburger down on her plate. She says, “Tony, I have a client that is in Europe with his family on an extended vacation. It’s the Davis’ house west of town on Carter Place.”

Tony laughs and then says, “House?! That’s a mansion, not a house.”

Jamie says, “I agree with you. I take care of the place while they are away. Well... Mister Davis sent me an email yesterday that they are coming home early... be here late Christmas Eve, the next Monday. He wants the outside of the house decorated for Christmas... you know, twinkling lights, Santa Class and reindeer and... everything. His daughter, whom I might add, is very difficult to please, has requested this done. He does everything to make her happy, but I haven’t seen that girl smile yet. She is confined to a wheelchair and I guess she doesn’t have too much to be happy about. I’m in a tough bind, as I have to go to Denver Wednesday and won’t be back until Christmas Eve. I need someone to do the lights and all the other. What do you say? It pays two hundred.”

Tony smiles and replies, “If that’s ‘dollars’ you have a deal.”

“Great! The lights and all the other stuff are in the garage. I’ll arrange it with the maid before I leave and she has the key. Thanks, Tony... you saved my job.”

“No. Thank you... Thanks for giving me the job.”

It’s after dark, Christmas Eve, and Tony has just completed turning on the lighted Nativity in the front yard of the Davis residence. He did the difficult job of stringing the icicle lights on the house all day Saturday and Sunday afternoon. He was off today, Monday, and he just completed the yard displays. Rebecca has been playing in the big back yard while Tony finishes up.

“Nice Job, Mister Stanza.” It is Jamie and she has her son, Rob, with her. “We just got back from Denver. I think you did a great job. The twinkling lights add a lot.”

A voice calls, “I think so also.” They are startled as they turn to see a man and a woman with a little girl about Rebecca’s age in a wheel chair coming up the sidewalk.”

Jamie says, “Mister Davis, it’s good to see you again. How was Europe?”

“It was fine... We decided to come back for Christmas... Marcy was getting tired and we wanted to have Christmas here. The house looks great. What do you think, Marcy?”

The little girl looks up at the lights, shrugs and replies, “It looks okay... Can we go inside, Daddy? I’m a little tired.”

“Certainly, Honey.” Davis says, “Jamie, please come in and have some hot chocolate. I called Madeline and asked her to prepare some for us. Will you join us, Mister...”

Jamie says, “I’m sorry, Mister Davis. This is my friend, Tony Stanza.”

“Mister Stanza, you and your daughter are invited also. You certainly deserve some refreshment for the fine job you did on the house.”

“Thank you... I would like that very much.”

They go up the ramp next to the driveway to get to the front porch that runs across the front of the house. They were almost to the front door and Marcy asks, “What’s that silver box on the floor?”

Mister Davis asks, “Mister Stanza, is this your box?”

Tony replies, “I haven’t seen it before. Let me take a look.” He picks up the box, slides the clasp and opens the lid.

“WOW!!! Watch out!” Tony yells as the box explodes with twenty or more colorful butterflies taking flight. Tony throws the box one way and he staggers backward, trips over the porch railing and lands softly in the bushes next to the front steps.

Jamie and Mister Davis rush to Tony’s aid. Jamie asks, “Tony! Are you okay?”

Tony is laughing. He says finally, “I’m all right. Just my pride is damaged. Imagine being frightened of...”

He stops in mid-sentence. And they all turn to see Marcy laughing so hard she is rocking her wheel chair. She says between laughing, “Mister Tony.... That was the funniest... thing I...ever saw.”

“Well, I’m glad you like it, Marcy. Believe me... it wasn’t planned.”

“Daddy! Daddy!” Rebecca is pulling on Tony’s jacket and pointing up at the lights.

“What is it, Rebecca?”

“Look at those butterflies. They have landed on the white lights and their wings look like the stained glass windows at the church. Red and blue and green colors like their wings are made of glass.”

Tony says, “It really does... they certainly make pretty Christmas colors. Let’s go inside and get some hot chocolate.”

After they have their hot chocolate, Marcy is still laughing about Tony's antics with the butterflies. Mister Davis says to Jamie and Tony, "This is the greatest thing that has happened in a long, long time. I've never seen her so happy. Jamie, whatever I told you I would pay for the decoration service, double it. Thanks, Tony. I don't know how you did it, but it worked."

As they are leaving, Jamie says, "Great job, Tony. You'll get a bonus out of this."

"Well... since I've come into wealth, how about you and Rob going to the movie with Rebecca and Me tomorrow. It's a tradition that we go to a movie on Christmas night.

"That would be great, Tony. A real date."

"Merry Christmas, Jamie. See you tomorrow."

As Tony and Rebecca walk to their car for the ride home, Rebecca says, "Daddy, you know Mother's jewelry box that you let me play with?" She continues when Tony nods his head, "Well, there are a bunch of butterfly pins in that box that are the same colors as those butterflies tonight."

Tony rubs his chin and then says, "I don't know about flying glass butterfly pins, but maybe your mother painted some butterflies and sent them down to us."

"Maybe so." Rebecca laughs and then says, "Merry Christmas, Daddy"

*Christmas lights remind us of that first starry Christmas night
when God shared the true Heavenly light
so we can find our way back home.*

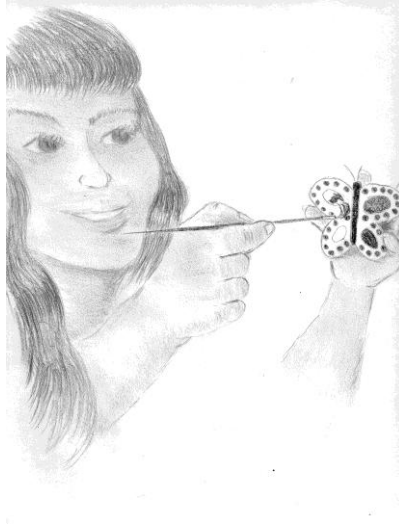
Not far away in the land filled with true Christmas lights and the sweet fragrance of Joy, Jesus and Robin are watching the events in the realm of time.

Jesus looks at his child and says, "Very good, little Mariposa. Your little friends made a sad little girl happy this Christmas and helped someone you love start his life over again."

Robin says, "Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity and... Happy Birthday, Jesus!"

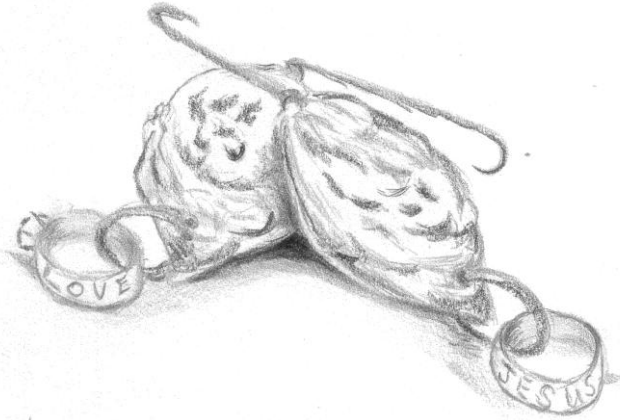
"Merry Christmas, my child."

**Christmas is when the Prince of heaven
Wrapped himself in the cocoon of humanity,
Matured in the embrace of sacrificial love
And then emerged an eternal monarch.**



Two Peach Pits

Visit Ninety – A Christmas Love Story



“Mom, are you certain the kids won’t be too much for you this afternoon?”
Mazie asks her mother.

“Don’t be silly, Mazie”, Essie replies. “My two favorite grandchildren will help me decorate my Christmas tree. How about it, kids?”

“You bet, Grandma,” Kelly replies.

“Are we really your favorites, Grandma?” Kasie asks?

“Actually, you guys are my only grandchildren, so I guess you are my favorites.”
To her daughter, she says, “Go on, Mazie, we will have a great time. Go and do your shopping and when you get back, we’ll have a piece of that chocolate pie I made this morning.

“If that’s your famous chocolate pie you always made for Dad, then I won’t take too long shopping.”

Essie says, “It was his favorite desert. I swear that man could put away more pie than anyone I know.”

Not far away, in the dimension of forever, Josh is lying in a hammock that is hung between two trees. He is relaxed with his eyes closed and appears to be asleep.

Suddenly, he is awake as he sits up in the hammock, almost tipping over. He felt the presence of his Lord and his heart fills to overflowing with love.

Jesus says, "Hello, Josh. You mentioned you wanted to help with the Christmas decorations. We are about ready to start."

"Yes, Jesus. I'm ready. This is one of my favorite activities for the celebration."

"Kasie, can you reach that empty branch on the right... the one below the Santa Claus sitting in his rocking chair? Put this one there."

Kasie replies, "Yes, Grandma, I can do it."

"Where do you want to put this bell, Grandma?" Kelly held up a silver bell.

"Oh, that's the bell we got on our vacation trip in.... Let me look at it, Kelly. Thank you..., Yes, it's engraved... Jacksonville, Florida. It's dated nineteen, ninty-four. Oh, that was a good time. Your Grandpa Josh really enjoyed the fishing from the pier. You pick out a spot for it, Kelly."

"I don't remember Grandpa," Kasie says.

"Me neither," says Kelly.

"Well that's because your Grandpa Josh went home to be with Jesus the year you were born, Kelly. You use to lie in his arms and he would tickle your little face with his face whiskers. It would drive your Mother wild."

"I wish he was here," Kasie remarks. "Me too," Kelly says.

"Yes... I do also," Essie says. "But God had other plans for your Grandpa. He needed him in heaven."

Kelly says, "We're about finished, Grandma. The only things left in the storage box are two white boxes. What are they?"

"Oh, those are just silly old things that your Grandpa and I use to hang on the tree when he was... still here."

"Can we see them? Oh, please, Grandma." Kasie is very insistent.

"Yes, Grandma... Please!" Kelly cries.

"Well, of course you can. Bring them here, Kelly. Why don't you two sit beside me on the sofa."

Essie takes the top off one of the white boxes. The two children push and shove as they strain to see the box's contents. Essie lifts out an old peach pit with wire hangers attached to it.

"What is that, Grandma?" Kelly asks.

"It's a peach pit, Kelly. Your Grandpa gave it to me when he asked me to marry him. We had looked at this property earlier and we wanted to buy it and settle here after we married and had saved enough money. You know that old peach tree in the back? Well, your Grandpa, without me knowing, bought this land. He took a peach from the tree and broke it apart and made the peach pit into a Christmas ornament. See... he even shellacked it for preservation.

Then, he attached this ring, my engagement ring, on the wire hanging down from the peach pit and placed it in this white box. We went on a date the next weekend and he give me this box. I was shocked when I opened the box and saw the peach pit. But when I pulled it out and saw the ring I knew what was going on. Your Grandpa was quite a guy... a very special guy. We were married on Christmas Eve that year."

She continues, "Well, from that day on, we hung this ornament on our tree each Christmas. I would take my ring and attached it to the peach pit."

"Can we put it on the tree, Grandma? Kasia pleads.

"Yes, Grandma, it would be so special." Kelly agrees.

Essie thinks a moment and then says, "Yes. I believe it would be a good idea. Here, I'll put my ring on it like we use to do and you find a place for it on the tree."

After a little discussion between Kasia and Kelly about where to place the treasure, the two children return to the sofa. Kasia asks, "Can we look in the other box, Grandma?"

"Sure we can," Essie says as she takes the lid off the top of the white box. She pulls out another peach pit similar to the first, with wires and all. There is a ring attached to the bottom wire.

"What's that ring, Grandma?" Kasia asks. "Is that a wedding ring or what?"

Essie replies, "Look at it closely. What does it say on the side?"

Kelly replies, "It says 'J...E...S...U...S'". Then he exclaims, "It says Jesus, Grandma!"

"What does it mean, Grandma?" Kasia asks.

"It's kind of a long story, but I think we have some time before your Mother gets here. Well, when we got married, your Grandpa was not a Christian... he didn't know

Jesus. Oh, that bothered me a lot. Your Grandpa was a good man and he loved me with all his heart... just as I did him, but there was something missing in his life and it was Jesus.

I went to church each Sunday and your Grandpa would stay home. I prayed and prayed for his soul, but the years kept passing and nothing happened. I always asked him to go to church with us... your Mother was born then and we would go each Sunday. Your Grandpa would refuse to go and would sit at the kitchen table and drink coffee and read the Sunday paper. I have to admit I quit asking him to go each Sunday. I kept praying for him, but I didn't ask him to go to church. I think God had a plan and my pestering your Grandpa wasn't a part of His plan.

One Sunday a week before Christmas, after we had breakfast and it was time to get ready to go to church, your Mother, she was about ten years old, said, 'Daddy, if you're not going to Heaven, then I'm not either. I don't want to be nowhere you ain't. I'm not going to church either.' I was so surprised that I was speechless.

Well, your Grandpa put down his paper and as he looked at your Mother, I could see tears in his eyes. He said, 'Daughter, I don't want to be nowhere you ain't either, but I want you to go to heaven. So I'm going to get right with God and we'll go together.' He got up from his chair and we all got ready for church and we went. He accepted Jesus that very day and he never missed a service the rest of his days."

Kelly asks, "What about this ring and peach pit, Grandma?"

"For Christmas that year, I bought your Grandpa that ring to show his commitment to Jesus. I had some old peach pits saved and I shellacked one just like I saw your Grandpa do many times. I fixed it just like the other one and gave it to him for Christmas. Each year we would display our ornaments on the tree with our rings to show our love for each other and Jesus."

"Can we put Grandpa's peach pit on the tree too, Grandma?" asks Kasie.

"You surely can, Kasie. See if you can find a place where they can hang together again."

"We'll find a place, Grandma," Kelly says.

Mazie comes in the front door and yells, "I'm home, kids. Did Grandma survive the two munchkins?"

Kelly says, "Mom, Grandma told us about the two peach pits."

Mazie looks at the tree and then her mother. She says, "I'm glad to see them hanging together on the tree again. It looks perfect now."

Essie says, "I think so too."

Josh remarks to Jesus, “The decorations for your Birthday celebration look pretty good if I do say so myself, Lord.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Josh. It is a fine job.”

As they arrive back at Josh’s hammock, he says, “Thank you, Jesus, for these two peach trees. They make great hangers for my hammock.”

“Actually, my son, you stored two peach pits in heaven so that I could grow these trees for you to enjoy.”

“Happy Birthday, Jesus!”

“Merry Christmas, my child.”

God planted His Seed from the Tree of Life
in the womb of a mortal maiden as promised
and invites all prodigals to eat of this eternal
Fruit and return to the Garden.

**For you have been born again,
not of perishable seed, but imperishable,
through the living and enduring word of God.
1 Peter 1:23**