

Heavenly Visits

Book Two

Includes Visits Thirty-one to Sixty



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The Crown Bearer

Visit Thirty-one - An Easter Story

As we look across the white, sun-reflecting countryside, we catch a glimpse from time to time of skiers as they traverse the familiar and not-so-familiar paths down the mountain slopes to the east and west. The pine trees are laden with a new blanket of snow and the drifts along the roads are piled high.

When we step off the cleared paths, we don't sink into the snow nor do we leave footprints to mar the fluffy arrangements that have been placed here by the hand of God. This doesn't mean that you can't scoop up a handful of the frozen crystals and fashion the biggest and best snowballs in history or roll out body parts for the creation of snowmen-handiwork worthy of first prizes. The snow packs perfectly.

There's Bobby and Joyce over by the ski lodge working on snow sculptures of a deer family including a fawn that is probably named 'Bambi'. Down the path toward the town of Grace, several boys and girls have built forts and they are having a great time defending their separate creations as hoarded snowballs are flying in all directions. We would be wise to stay clear of the battle, unless you wish to join in on one side or the other.

It is the best of occasions in heaven. Easter is almost here and everywhere you feel the excitement and the awakening of life. Easter is the purest meaning of life as no one would be here in heaven without what happened on that first Easter. This is the time; if you can use the word 'time' in heaven, that everyone looks forward with anticipation. It is a celebration to honor the gift of God, the gift of His son, Jesus. This is the name above every name, the name at which every knee will bow and every tongue confess his lordship. For without his sacrifice, our sins could not be forgiven and we would not have the opportunity to return to the garden, to be with God, the father. We would not be able to worship God by our very choice of accepting his perfect gift and experiencing his great creation of heaven. Worship is more than singing praises, worship is being with and in God's love.

It won't be long before this area will be void of souls as they will travel to the holy city to worship the son of God. Everything is in preparation for this event in the city at the very heart of heaven. The food will be perfect and there will be so many selections that it will be difficult not to stuff yourself. The flowers will be beautiful and the crystal centerpieces on the tables will be elegant and almost worthy of the lamb of God's brilliance and purity. Tapestries made from strands of gold and silver will adorn the walls of the great halls. There will be fragrances of honey-suckle and magnolia blossoms that fill the air. Hummingbirds and butterflies will dart and flutter from soul to soul, drinking in the sweet nectar of the spirit of life that overflows from the blossoms of each

heart. Great cups filled with the blood of Christ will taste like honey and precious jewels will be scattered about as decorations on the fine linens that cover the great banquet tables. The light from the very heart of God will bring to clarity the strangest of mysteries and chase away the darkness of self to expose the love and compassion of the mighty Creator, the I Am.

We see Plasure and Glowden, the attending angels, hurrying up the trail toward the ski lodge. Plasure has a worried expressions on her face.

Plasure says, "I forgot... it's the only thing I forgot this time. I should have let you handle it."

Glowden replies, "It's all right, Plasure... We have plenty of time. I would have missed it also. Don't worry... I know he's here. Jesus said so."

They pass a few skiers with their skis on their shoulders heading down the mountain. Plasure asks, "Are you sure? There are so many leaving... We might have missed him."

Glowden laughs and replies, "I'm certain he's still here. Jesus said he would be making a last run down the slopes. He always wants to get one more run in. Quit worrying."

Sure enough, as they look up toward the top of the mountain, they can make out one lone figure skillfully threading his way along the path, past the pine trees, ever greens and rocks. It is a picture of grace and beauty as the figure glides over the packed snow on silver skis, first to the left and then smoothly to the right as he speeds down the slopes.

The figure comes nearer and nearer. The angels move to one side as the skier artfully turns his skis to the side and he slides to a halt as snow flies in all directions. The skier lifts his goggles to reveal a young man who appears to be in his early teens. It is difficult to know the age of someone in heaven, but he does look young. He exclaims, "Wow! That was one awesome ride... Did you see that?! Man, that was great!"

"Yes, Martin, it was a great.... whatever." Plasure replies as she wrings her hands, "We need your help."

Martin looks at the angel and says, "You need my help? Why do you need my help?"

Plasure looks at Glowden for help. Glowden says, "We need for you to go get the Crown for Jesus. A new one is made for each celebration."

"Why don't you go get it? Why does it have to be me?"

"Only a child of God can deliver it. Jesus says it has to be you... no one but you."

"I'm just a kid... There are others more worthy than I am. I don't know much and I haven't been in heaven very long."

"Jesus says you are the only one," Plasure says. "Your heart is the purest and you know enough to love God. That's all that matters. Besides, Jesus has chosen you to be the one."

Martin thinks a moment and then replies, "Well, if Jesus says so.... If he thinks I should, then... You bet... I'll do it. What do I do?"

Plasure replies, "Go with Glowden to the mountain top and wait for the Crown. I've got to finish preparations for the celebration. Bring the Crown as soon as possible."

Plasure leaves and Glowden says, "Let's go, God's child. Plasure is worried enough without us tarrying. Hang on around my neck."

Martin follows instructions and soon they are flying high above the snow surface. Martin exclaims, "Wow... This is better than any old ski lift. Where were you when I needed you earlier, Glowden?"

Glowden just laughs. She says, "I'll be around forever for you to ride, Martin. As soon as you ski down, I'll deliver you right back up to the top."

They arrive at the top of the mountain. Glowden sets Martin down on the ground. Martin asks, "What are we waiting for? Where is the Crown?"

"The Crafter is making it. It should be on the way now." Glowden points to the east and exclaims, "Look! The Crown is coming."

Martin looks in the direction that the angel is pointing. He sees only a speck on the horizon. The speck becomes larger and larger. Soon, Martin can make out an eagle flying toward them. The eagle has something in its mouth. As it descends and lands on Glowden's arm, Martin sees that it is carrying thorn brambles shaped into a crown. The eagle has been careful to grab the crown with its beak so that the thorns don't hurt it.

Glowden can see that Martin is puzzled. She asks, "What's wrong, Martin?"

"I thought the crown would be different."

"This is like the crown that Jesus wore for you. It is fitting that he wear it again on this celebration day. Hurry... we must get to the holy city. Take the crown carefully, Martin."

Martin holds out his hands and the eagle deposits the crown into his protection. A thorn pricks his skin ever so lightly and a small drop of blood appears. He looks at Glowden.

She says, "It's all right, Martin. It will heal... Hang on around my neck and don't drop the crown."

Martin complies and he holds the crown with one hand and places the other arm around the angel's neck. Soon they are flying high above the clouds. Martin looks down through a break in the clouds and sees the golden city, the new Jerusalem, below them. Glowden drops quickly to the surface and places Martin on the ground.

Plasure is waiting for them. She exclaims, "You made it right on time! We must hurry. Jesus is waiting. Shut your eyes, Martin!"

She scoops Martin up into her arms and he shuts his eyes. When he opens them again, he is standing on a long red carpet in a great hall. There are banquet tables that fill the great hall. He sees many children of God sitting at the tables enjoying the feast. Everyone is laughing and having a wonderful time.

Martin follows the red carpet to the foot of a raised throne. He looks up to see Jesus sitting on a golden throne looking at him. Martin drops to his knees and lowers his head at the sight of his Lord.

Jesus waves his arm and Martin is drawn into the very heart of God. Nervousness and anxiety flee from his presence as Martin sinks into the arms of Jesus. Love and devotion envelope his soul, consume his being, as he is re-created into perfect union with God. Jesus' blood has cleansed the unrighteousness from his heart and left a pure sweet spirit of fellowship and holy communion, acceptable to the honor and glory of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Jesus whispers in his ear, "What do you have for me, my brother?"

Martin lifts the cruel, harsh, thorny head adornment to his savior. He says, "I've brought this to you, Lord, but please don't wear it for me. You've done it already... you've shed your blood for me and given your life for what I've done. You've taken on your shoulders the dark vile reality of my sins and assumed my place, my reward in hell. You've done it all and it's perfect as it is. Don't suffer any more for me. It's too much."

Jesus replies, "I did die for you, my son, and my suffering was for you and the world, and I would gladly do it again, but on the cross I said it is finished and it is. The sacrificial lamb has paid it all, nothing else is required, the plan is complete."

Martin watches as Jesus take this symbol of his earthly kingship, this thorny-halo of glory and places it again on his head. The crown of thorns is instantly transformed into a crown of gold and precious jewels, it's brilliance consumes the celebration hall and

the king's subjects shield their eyes from its splendor. The prince has taken his rightful place, at the side of God, the father.

Martin looks at himself and finds he is robed in a white linen gown, the symbol of purity and he feels the crowns of righteousness, service and life resting on his head. His soul is carried to the highest point in heaven and he gently floats like a feather in the arms of Jesus; his heart overflowing with joy and peace.

Jesus says to his child, "Thank you, Martin, for being my crown bearer. You chose this task and you have made the worship celebration perfect. You are the reason for God's gift of Easter.

Somewhere far away, Martin hears the gentle voices of a large crowd singing "Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me" in his honor. Martin is experiencing the power of that Grace as he embraces the joy of fulfillment, the very reason he was reborn; the presence and fellowship of his mighty and loving God.

*Blessed is the man who
perseveres under trial,
because when he has stood the test,
he will receive the crown of life
that God has promised
to those who love him.
James 1:12*

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Guiding Hands

Visit Thirty-two A Mother's Day Story

The sky is filled with many varieties of butterflies and moths. There are large monarchs down to small green wing saddle-back moths. A slight breeze is blowing gently from the north as Molly lays in the clover and wild flowers on a hill. She is watching the procession of flying insects as they travel to the holy city in the valley. She loves the many feasts that take place in heaven and this one promises to be the best of the best.

Molly returned to the Garden many of our years ago, but it seems to her that she has been here only a few weeks. There is so much to see and so much to do and learn in heaven that time, if you can call it time, appears to move so slowly and leisurely. Right now, Molly is examining the structure of clouds, the fluffy sculptures that drift across the dark blue sky. That one looks like the face of an old man and that one over there has long ears like a rabbit.

"I must remember to ask Jesus if he creates the cloud designs or if he leaves that decision to one of his angels."

"The Lord creates everything, Child of God."

Molly is startled as Blasdon is standing beside her, his tall, muscular body blocking her view of the sky. She exclaims, "Blasdon, you scared me! You always do that... just appear from nowhere."

Blasdon laughs and then replies, "I'm sorry, Molly Child. Next time I'll try to whistle before I speak to you."

Molly laughs. She says, "That's okay, Blasdon. What can I do for you?"

"Jesus wants you to be a lamp carrier for the feast. He sent me to find you."

"He wants me?! Jesus wants me?! I've never been asked to be a lamp carrier before. That's a very high honor... to raise my lamp when the bridegroom arrives at the wedding feast. Oh my, what will I wear?"

Blasdon laughs again. He says, "Molly, you make me so happy. I'm certain you will pick the right gown to wear."

"What if I fall asleep?... you know, in the bible... Jesus told about some maidens that were waiting for the bridegroom to come and they fell asleep, and the foolish ones ran out of lamp oil, had to go get some more oil and missed His arrival. Blasdon, what if I do that or something else foolish?"

"You won't, little one. You will do just fine. Remember, Jesus asked for you and that makes you a perfect choice."

"You're right, Blasdon. If Jesus picked me... then I will do just fine. I wish Mom could know that I've got this honor."

"Why do you say that, child?"

"Well, I didn't do too much when I was in the world. You know... I didn't really accomplish anything very special and I wasn't too sure Mom was proud of me. I just wish she was here to see me."

Blasdon was thoughtful for a moment and then he says, "It's not time for your mother to come to heaven, Molly child. And you're wrong about not accomplishing much in the world. You did more than you realize. Your mother is very proud of you."

"You're sweet to say that, Blasdon, but you're my friend. You've been with me from my birth in the world... you took care of me and was with me when I came to heaven. You think I'm great because you love me."

"Of course, I love you, God's child... Everyone does..." After a long pause, Blasdon says, "I think you need to make a little visit with me, little Molly. Let's go get your gown and lamp and then we'll go see someone special..."

Polly gets the wheelchair out of the trunk of the car and helps her mother get settled in the chair. She pushes the frail lady to the area between the chapel and the family life center buildings. Polly's mom loves the peace and quiet of the oak-tree-shaded area. It is spring time and the birds are flitting from tree to tree, chirping to the glory of the creator and rejoicing in the renewal of life. Flowers planted around the gazebo, that stands in the center of the courtyard, are in full bloom and their fragrances fill the air. A squirrel in a branch high above is chattering to his true love two trees away.

"Mother, I'm going to sit on the bench over there and read a while. Can I get you anything?"

"No, dear... Thank you... I'll be fine here."

Trudy has been a member of this church for over fifty years. She and her husband, Frank, worked in numerous areas of the church up until they got up in years and their health took a bad turn. They both live with their daughter, Polly and her husband, Ben. There is a nurse that comes in each day to take care of Mom and Dad. Dad is at home, asleep now. Polly thought it would be good for Mom to have a change of scenery and some fresh air, so here she is... at her favorite spot.

Trudy has spent a lot of time here... Mostly, she had been praying and asking for God's guidance in some area of her life, but sometimes she was thanking God for being so good to her. Also she had spent a lot of prayer-time asking for God's help and blessing for the church and its staff. This was a good place, a place she felt close to God and to his peace and love.

She feels tired and Trudy closes her eyes. Soon she is asleep and her head drops to her chest.

"Mom... Mom! It's me, Molly."

Trudy opens her eyes and there is her little girl. "Molly! Oh, how I've missed you, child. Who is that with you? I don't know him."

"This is my friend, Blasdon... He was... is my guardian angel. I've missed you too, Momma."

"That is a beautiful dress, Molly... You look so lovely... "

"Jesus picked me to be a lamp maiden at the wedding feast."

Trudy reached out to touch her daughter. "I'm so proud of you, Molly. You're a special child of God."

Molly took her mother's hand and kissed it. "Thank you for your guiding hand that lead me to Jesus. I've got to go now, Mom... I'll be late for the feast. We'll see each other soon. Good-bye. I love you."

Trudy says, "I love you too, Molly."

Polly is bending over her mother. She says, "What's that, Mom? Did you say, Molly? Wake up, Mom!"

Trudy comes out of her deep sleep. She asks, "What did you say, Polly? I'm awake now. I must have dozed off."

Polly says, "You certainly did... I was reading and I heard you carrying on a conversation with someone... I thought you said... Molly. Did you dream of Molly, Mom?"

"I believe I did. She had on a white dress and I think she said something about a wedding. She was very pretty, but I don't remember much... Funny about dreams... they seem so real and you want to remember all about them, but you can't."

"I was thinking about Molly the other day," Polly remarks. "She was something special. I miss her. She was the one that guided me to Jesus... to God. I know we'll see each other in heaven, but I do miss her now."

Trudy says, "Both of my girls are special... I look forward to us being together again in heaven too. Go on back and read awhile, Polly. I'm going to pray and thank God for all my blessings... especially my family."

"Okay, but remember this is Mother's Day and we have some ice cream and cake at home plus some presents to open."

Blasdon and Molly are walking up the hill from the holy city. The feast is over and Molly is very happy. She asks, "I did okay, didn't I, Blasdon?"

"You were great, little one. Jesus is very proud."

"Momma is proud too... right, Blasdon?"

"Very proud, God's child. She is very proud of you."

**My son, keep your father's commands
and do not forsake
your mother's teaching.
For these commands are a lamp,
this teaching is a light,
and the corrections of discipline
are the way to life,
Proverbs 6: 20, 23**

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Footsteps

Visit Thirty-three

A Father's Day Story

Cory is laying in his master's lap, slowly licking his calico fir, trying to obtain that just right feeling. It isn't that his fir needs grooming, it is a pleasant habit that Cory enjoys. Cory is a cat who lived a full and playful life in the world and is now enjoying the fruits and pleasures of heaven.

Cory's master, John, is reading a book. John and Cory are sitting on a wooden bench in the shade of a tall pecan tree. John occasionally will rub Cory's head and neck, which Cory loves. John has been in heaven about eight of our years, but to him it's only been a few days at the most. Time just doesn't exist in the Garden. Cory had been in heaven for much longer and was waiting for John at the Gate with Jesus when John came home.

Brandon and Jessica are having a great time among the tall trees, taking turns chasing each other until one touches the other and yells, "You're it... I got you." The brother and sister are camping out with their parents for the weekend. Brandon is five years old and Jessica is almost seven.

The last thing their dad said was, "Don't go too far from camp... You could get lost." At first they had obeyed, but as sometimes happens when fun is involved, they had forgotten. It had rained during the night. The little streams of water that flowed down the hill from their camp toward the river kept inviting them further and further away from familiar surrounding.

Now, they are quite lost, but they don't know it, nor do they care. Brandon is trying to catch his sister and Jessica is more concerned about staying just out of her brother's reach. The wet grass and the slippery, muddy paths are ideal for causing difficult, but exciting footing.

Brandon lunges for his sister just as she makes a sharp turn. He falls onto a rock. He feels the sharp pain as he yells, "Ow! My arm... it hurts. Jessica!!"

Jessica bends down next to her brother. She says, "It's okay, Brandon... Come on, get up..."

"My arm hurts, Jessica... I want Daddy... It hurts bad... really bad."

"Okay... cry baby... We'll go back to camp..."

For the first time, Jessica realizes she doesn't know just where camp is. She says, "Come on, Brandon, camp is this way."

Brandon says, "No it isn't, stupid... It's over there."

Jessica looks at her brother and says, "We're lost, Brandon... How are we going to get to camp. I don't know which way is right... they all look the same."

"Come on, Jess... remember what Daddy said... He said if we were in trouble, to pray and help will come."

John looks up from his book to gaze out over the rolling hills and valleys before him. He remarks, "Cory, I've never been able to see so clearly. It isn't what I see, but how I see. It's amazing the clarity and depth that God has given me as a gift in heaven. I feel as if I can see forever; from the beginning to far into the future. There's so much to learn and experience... and there's no rush. I have all of eternity to enjoy this great and wonderful gift."

John places Cory beside him on the bench and rises to his feet. He raises his arms toward the dark blue sky and cries, "Lord God, thank you for your unfailing love and your everlasting mercy to this forgiven sinner."

He feels a pressing need. He turns and kneels down beside the bench. He rests his head in his hands and prays for his son. "Lord Jesus, be with Warren... Guide him and help him to know you. I came home before Warren turned to you... I didn't do all I needed to do to convenience him that you are the only way. Oh, Lord, I hope Warren will come here to live with us forever... Have mercy on him, God, as you did me."

John feels an arm around his shoulders. He opens his eyes and finds Jesus kneeling next to him. The joy in his heart overflows as tears stream down his face. Jesus wipes the tears from John's eyes and says, "My son, your faith has brought us together... Your love for your son overcomes all obstacles. Your instructions and guidance will endure forever."

John says, "You've always been beside me, Lord... I've felt your presence. When I was eleven, I was with you."

"That's right, God's child. I've always been with you from that day... and you with me."

"I just don't know why I couldn't pass the love I have for you on to Warren. He grew up and didn't have you in his life. He still didn't know you when I returned here to be with you."

"I need for you to help one of my angels, Blasdon. I want you to go with Blasdon to the world and do something that I have been asked to do."

John is astonished. He asks, "I can go back to the world? Is that possible, Jesus?"

"It is if I want it to happen. I do at this time. Will you go?"

"Oh yes, Lord... Whatever you need of me, I'll do."

Jesus calls, "Blasdon! John is ready."

"I still don't know which way is camp, Brandon. What are we going to do? Your arm is swollen and it does look bad... I wish Daddy was here."

"Daddy says that God loves us and will take care of us. It'll be okay, Jess... Don't worry." Brandon exclaims as he tries to get his sister to look up the hill, "Look, Jess... Look over there, next to that tall tree!!! It's Daddy!!... Come on... Let's go!"

Jessica replies, "I don't see Daddy, Brandon... Are you sure? Okay... Okay, I'm coming."

As they arrive at the spot, Brandon asks, "Where did Daddy go? I know I saw him right here."

"Look, Brandon, there's footprints. I bet those are Daddy's."

Brandon looks to where Jessica is pointing in the soft mud. He exclaims, "Daddy is playing a game with us. Come on, Jess, let's find him by following his footprints."

He holds his injured arm as he and Jessica follow the footprints up the path. It isn't long before they spot their campsite.

Jessica calls as she runs to the camp, "Mommy! Daddy! Brandon has hurt his arm... It might be broke or something."

It's a short time later. Brandon and his father are in the tent. His father has placed a splint on his son's arm and has it bandaged. He replies to his son's question, "No... I wasn't down the hill. I've been here with your mother all morning. I was thinking I should go look for you, but I was fixing breakfast and couldn't leave."

"Well, he looked a lot like you, Daddy." Brandon says. "If it hadn't been for following his footprints, we wouldn't have been able to get back to camp."

"I'm going to have to find him and thank him for helping you kids. It's funny that he would come so close to our camp and not stop in. I'll look around later and see if he's camped nearby. It sounds like he was an answer to your prayer."

Jessica and their mother come into the tent. Their mother says, "Breakfast is getting cold. How do you feel, Brandon? Think you can eat something?"

"Wow! You bet... I'm starved."

Their mother asks, "Warren, how is his arm? Do we need to get to the clinic?"

"I think it can wait until after we eat, Mary. I'll take Brandon and they'll check out his arm. I don't know for certain if it's broken or not."

Jesus is sitting on the bench holding Cory when John returns to heaven. Jesus hands Cory to John after John sits down beside him. Jesus asks, "How was your visit, my brother?"

"It was wonderful, Jesus. Just to know Warren will be coming here makes me so happy. Thank you, Jesus, for sharing this with me."

"I wanted you to see how he followed in your footsteps."

"Your footsteps were there before mine, Jesus. I was just following you."

"And you know how happy that makes me, my son."

**The Sovereign Lord
is my strength;
he makes my feet
like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.
Habakkuk 3:19 (NIV)**

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Myra's Puppy

Visit Thirty-four

It is a lazy summer day in heaven. The temperature is warm due to the bright sun, but the gentle breeze from the west is refreshing and cool. The birds are chirping and singing a happy tune while accompanied by familiar grasshopper leg fiddling. The sounds of the cicada can be heard throughout this remote forest area of the Garden.

As we walk down the tree shaded paths, you can smell the sweet fragrance of honeysuckle and wild roses. A rabbit springs up from its hiding place and bounds down the path ahead of us. Probably she is a mother attempting to lure us away from the location of her babies. A squirrel high above us in the trees is scolding us for invading the sanctity and privacy of his forest kingdom. There's a beautiful butterfly with blue wings and yellow markings flitting among the wildflowers over by that tall oak tree. The gentle buzz of honeybees can be heard from their nest in a hollow tree on the other side of the path.

If you listen closely, you can hear the gentle sounds of water flowing over rocks in the stream nearby. The path is leading us toward the river. As we get nearer to the water, the path opens up into a field of newly sprouted wheat. The stalks are only two to three feet high and it appears there will be a good harvest.

Suddenly, a stick about six inches long comes hurdling through the air and lands a few feet in front of us in the wheat. In an instant, a big, black dog comes bounding through the wheat. He reaches the spot where the stick hit and he scoops it up in his mouth. He hesitates for a second or two as if inspecting us to see if we represent any danger or perhaps he is merely curious. He spins and races back to an area near the river.

As we come near the river edge, we spot a young man who appears to be about fifteen years of age sitting on the ground with cane pole in hand. It is difficult to determine age in heaven. Actually, Kelly was over thirty world years old when God called him home a few of our years ago. He throws the stick again for the big dog that was his friend in the world for about fifteen world years.

The big dog returns to his master with stick in mouth. Kelly exclaims, "Good dog, Mike! Now lay down over here and rest. I want to get in a little fishing before lunch. Maybe I'll get lucky and catch a trout or two that will look great in the frying pan. Why, I'll even share some of it with you."

Kelly throws his line into the water and the cork gently bobs in rhythm with the water ripples. A dragonfly lands on the cork for a second or two and then buzzes off to go wherever dragonflies go. Mike settles down on the ground next to his master and rests with his head between his paws.

Myra is sitting on the front porch of her family's house that is located on a busy street in the suburbs of a large city. She is about nine years old with long brown hair that is braided and hangs down her back. Myra is wearing red shorts and a matching sleeveless shirt which is appropriate for the middle of summer in this area of the world.

Myra is not noted for her patience as she cries, "Mother! Please hurry."

Her mother comes out of the house carrying a little puppy with white and tan markings. It is a terrier of some sort and very feisty. Her mother lays the excited puppy in Myra's lap and says, "Happy Birthday, Myra... Daddy said to give this to you even though he won't be home until this afternoon. We thought you might get started early with your birthday celebration."

Myra exclaims, "A puppy! My own little puppy! Thank you, Mother... This is the greatest birthday of my life."

The puppy is happy also. He starts licking Myra's face and he just can't stay still. Myra says, "I love you too, little puppy. I think I'll name you Billie... What do you think of that?" The puppy responds with more excited licks and wiggles.

Mother says, "Play with Billie on the porch and I'll be right back. I need to start your birthday cake and straighten up the house a little. Your Uncle Fred and Aunt Maxine will drop by later this evening. Be sure to stay on the porch with Billie. The traffic is pretty heavy today."

After her mother goes inside, Myra is content petting and holding her new friend. She says, "When my mother comes back, I'll ask her for some of my old clothes and I'll dress you. We'll have a big time."

Billie is too feisty to be content just sitting in Myra's lap. He wiggles and strains and finally escapes her grasp as he tumbles to the wooden porch. He no sooner hits the porch than he is up and scurrying down the steps to explore the great front yard area.

"Billie! Billie, come back here right now. This isn't funny. Mother said for us to stay on the porch and you disobeyed. Come back here and I won't tell Mother. Here, Billie... Billie! You're gonna' get run over by a car."

Myra hears Billie growling somewhere nearby. She carefully makes her way down the steps of the porch and out into her yard. She is guided by the playful sounds of Billie as he growls and barks at a piece of paper blowing in the wind. Myra almost reaches him and Billie scampers a short distance away and barks at her. They are moving

ever so close to the street and the cars that are whizzing by. She begs, "Please come here, Billie... You're gonna' get hurt."

Myra can only guess at where Billie might be as she frantically tries to find him and keep him from running into the street. She listens very hard to the growling and barking Billie is making. Myra is blind and has been since the car accident four years ago. "Please God, help me find Billie."

Kelly is almost asleep as he lays with his head on Mike and uses the big dog for a pillow. He is having difficulty keeping his cane pole from dipping into the water as his eyes slowly close.

His eyes open wide as Mike gives a soft, "Woof".

Kelly says, "Yes. I hear, Mike... Thanks."

Kelly listens carefully. He knows the Spirit of God is moving through the Garden. Kelly feels its presence. Just like in the world he could feel God close by. It is so difficult to explain how God comes close to his children. Some say it's the breath of God, others say it's a touch much like a feather as it brushes your skin, while others feel their hearts filled with joy and lifted to heaven's gate and some feel the Spirit's words gently caressing their souls.

Kelly opens his eyes and looks into the face of Jesus. His heart is filled to overflowing and the grace of God lifts Kelly into his loving arms. Jesus says, "How are you, my friend? Have you caught many fish today?"

"A few, Jesus. Would you like to have some after I cook them up?"

"You know I do, my child. First though, I need you to do something for me. Will you go to the world again and take care of something for me?"

"Tell me what you need, Lord. You know I will."

"I want you and Mike to go with Blasdon and assist someone who has asked for help. It won't take long and we'll eat when you get back." Jesus calls, "Blasdon! Kelly is ready to go."

Myra is moving closer and closer toward the street. Billie has found a butterfly that he thinks he is scaring with his barking. Myra cries, "Billie, don't you go into the street. You come here right now... I'm not fooling anymore."

Just as she is about to trip on the curb, she feels something at her legs. She says, "What's this? What a big dog. Where did you come from, big dog?"

Kelly says, "He's with me. His name is Mike. You were about to trip and fall into the street and Mike moved in front of you to keep you safe. He's trained to help blind people. He saved my life on many occasions. I believe this little fellow belongs to you." Kelly hands the puppy to Myra.

Myra exclaims, "Billie, where have you been? Thank you, mister, for helping us."

"No problem... Here I'll help you back to the porch."

After Myra is settled once again in her chair, she says, "Thanks, mister. Thank you and Mike..."

Her mother asks, "Who are you talking to, Myra?"

"A nice blind man and his guide dog helped me and Billie."

"I don't see anyone, honey. How long ago was he here?"

"Just before you came out of the house... He couldn't have gotten very far."

"Well, he's not in sight now. It was nice for him to help you. How about licking the mixing bowl?"

Kelly and Jesus are sitting next to a campfire. Mike is laying next to Kelly eating a portion of fish. Kelly asks, "How about another piece, Jesus?"

"That sounds great, my son. Let me have that one over on that side."

***Then Jesus told him, "Because you have
seen me, you have believed;
blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have believed."
John 20:29 (NIV)***

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A Tree for Timmy

Visit Thirty-five - A Christmas Story



Carol is tired; actually, Carol is exhausted. It has been a very long day and she worked very hard at the mall. Christmas is only a few days away and people are just starting to shop in earnest. There are so many presents to buy; gifts for aunts and uncles, grandmothers and nieces, and all the other family members, not to mention the many friends in the world.

Carol is envious of all the other people who seem to have so much money and can buy presents for so many, while she struggles to have enough food and shelter for her little family. It just doesn't seem fair. There just isn't enough money left over from the necessities of living for presents.

She goes to Timmy and Tasha's bedroom door and peeks in to check on her two treasures. Carol can see from the faint illumination of the "Tigger" night light that they are asleep; both of them also had a long day at child-care since Carol worked so late. She gave them a rare treat of supper at McBurgers on the way home. Timmy, her oldest at five, is asleep with his favorite stuffed dog and Tasha, who was four, has her baby doll named 'Queeny' clutched tightly to her side.

Carol thinks to herself, 'I hope they won't be too unhappy... if I can't get them too much this year. Our rent payment is past due and Mister Drake has been very patient with me.'

Carol rents this small house and the payment is over twenty days late. She checks her jar where she keeps the rent money and finds she is still fifty dollars short. Pay day is not until next Friday, after Christmas, and Carol sits down at the kitchen table and has a good cry.

"Don't cry, Mommy."

Carol is startled. She looks up and sees Timmy, his head just sticking up above the table top. He is holding his stuffed dog under his arm and he is rubbing his sleepy eyes with his other hand. He says, "It'll be okay, Mommy. I prayed and God says he's gonna take care of us."

The tears come even more, but Carol quickly wipes her eyes and reaches for her son. She holds him close to her heart and says, "I know, Timmy... Mommy just forgot for a minute. I'm just not certain God will be able to give you and Tasha the presents you want this year."

Timmy laughs and says, "Silly, Mommy... God will give us all we ask for... He promised. I bet we even have the best-est Christmas tree in the whole wide world."

Carol had forgotten. That was the first thing on Timmy's list; a Christmas tree. They didn't have a tree last year and Timmy had been disappointed. Trees are so expensive. There just isn't enough money for presents, much less, a tree. She is worried, but she says, "You're right, Timmy. I know God will fix everything."

Unseen by Carol or Timmy, two Guardians are watching from the corner of the kitchen beside the refrigerator. Jaston asks, "What are we going to do? Did you hear the child's prayer, Blasdon?"

Blasdon smiles and replies, "Yes, Jaston. I heard Timmy's prayer,... But more importantly... Jesus heard Timmy's prayer. He'll let us know what we must do."

Not too far away, in that dimension that is true and filled with the love of God, the place we call heaven, a young boy is putting a splint on a blue bird's wing. Dexter has been in heaven for about fifty of our years and for most of that time, he has taken care of the birds of heaven.

Dexter wasn't a veterinarian in the world. In fact, he had traded stocks at one of the major exchanges for over forty years before retiring and eventually returning to Eden when he was about eighty-five world years. He had enjoyed birds and had always wanted to take care of them and work maybe in a zoo aviary or bird sanctuary, but that hadn't worked out. God had known of Dexter's heartfelt goal and had asked Dexter if he would take care of His birds.

Dexter is sitting on the ground under a large oak tree. He finishes with the mending of the blue bird's wing. He gets up and places the bird on one of the lowest tree branches. He says, "Now, Birney, you stay real still and your wing will be okay in just a little while. No more flying until it's fixed... hear me?"

The bird appears to nod its head and Dexter smiles. Then Dexter feels the presence of Jesus. He notices that large flocks of birds are flying to the oak tree from all directions. Even the little bird, Birney, is excited and begins to flap his wings, including the one he is not suppose to move, as he also knows Jesus is coming.

Dexter's heart nearly explodes with joy as he feels Jesus' touch on his arm. He turns and is absorbed into the very being of God. The redemption of Dexter's soul and the forgiveness of his deepest sins has made him a righteous treasure to God. He has been washed in the blood and purified from his transgressions.

He is carried like a baby in the arms of God to where he can reach out and touch the sun, moon and stars, only to find he is touching the face of his creator, his savior, his father and friend. Dexter shuts his eyes and floats like a leaf on the gentle breeze of love. The fertile fragrance of faith fills his being, taking away the wrinkled and aged skin, the gray hair, the pains of dying humanity and transforms the affects of a just punishment of the ravishes of time into the pure, young and vibrant soul called Dexter, who walks in the Garden once again with his true companion, his God.

"What do you want, Lord? How may I serve?"

"Just being here is enough, my child. I created you so we could be together, to talk, to walk in the beauty of all I am and all that was and all there is or ever will be. I let you choose... I let you make the choice of forever death... separation from me in mindless and eternal time or to return to the fulfillment of my creation, to live in eternal communion with me and all that is real and true. Even though I had to punish you... to drive you from the Garden, I prepared a way for you to return... if you made the choice of so doing... and you did. What more could I want? What more could I need?"

"But I don't deserve your love?"

"That's why I love you... no one deserves love... I want to give it to you and because you accepted my love that makes us one in heart and soul and mind. You loved me enough to give up the temporal beauty of sin, the glories and fame of that rotting, false world to hold the mustard seed of faith in your heart, to trade knowledge for wisdom, hate for love and death for life. I loved you so much that I reached for you... You loved me enough to take my hand. Deserved? We deserve each other... and we have it... forever."

"What can I do for you, Lord?"

"You can help me make a faithful child's Christmas a little happier. I have heard his pray of faith and the hope in his heart."

"How can I help?"

"By doing what you do best. I need for you to go with Blasdon to the world and make that life a little better."

"I can return to the dimension of time?"

"When I need for you to and... I need it now. You will be protected from the affects of time and Blasdon will be with you as well as my Spirit. Will you help me?"

"You know I will, Lord."

"Blasdon!" Jesus calls for his servant.

"Here I am , Lord." Blasdon appears beside Jesus.

"Take my son, Dexter, to the world and protect him. You have your instructions. Go and spread my joy to the world. Hurry back... the celebration of my gift of life is about to begin... our feast of Christmas will begin soon and I want you both here with me."

A few days have passed and it's Christmas Eve. Carol, Timmy and Tasha have just arrived home. It had been a long and hard day at the mall. There were so many last minute shoppers. Carol had to pay extra to the baby-sitter because she had been so late.

To make things worse, Carol was only able to pick up a couple of little presents for the kids. She hoped they would not be disappointed. She busied herself warming some hot dogs for dinner.

There is a knock at the door. She calls, "I'll get it."

When she opens the door, she is startled. She says, "Oh, hello, Mister Drake. I was meaning to stop by your place on the way home... I'm afraid I'm gonna be later than expected with the rent payment. I can have it for you next Friday... that's my payday..."

She stops as Mister Drake holds up his hand. He says, "Let's not worry about that, Carol. I have a few presents for Timmy and Tasha."

Carol is dumb struck. She stammers, "Why.... how... Who is giving the presents?!"

"You know that church down the street... you know... the chapel church... the one with those oak trees around it. Well, they have this "angel tree" thing and they put children's names that they can give presents to on the tree and then they take 'em and there you are and here I am."

Mister Drake places a big black trash sack in the middle of the room and motions for Timmy and Tasha, who are peeking around the door frame of their bedroom, to come to him. He says, "Come on, Timmy... bring your sister. Here's a bunch of presents for each of you."

Squeals of joy burst from the mouths of the two children as they pounce on the bag and pull out present after present. Timmy can read a little and he instructs his sister, "This one is mine, Tasha. Here's one for you... this one's yours and this one's mine..."

There are tears in Carol's eyes as she says, "Thank you, Mister Drake... I'm speechless... just thank you so much... the children are so happy."

"Call me Ted... 'Mister' is so formal... not what friends would use. And don't thank me for the presents... they come from the church people."

"Isn't that your church, Mister... I mean Ted?"

"Well.... " Ted hesitates. He continues, "Yes... I do go there from time to time. They asked me to bring these presents since I come by on the way home. Well, I've got to get home. Merry Christmas, Carol... to you and the kids."

"Merry Christmas, Ted... and thank you again... Oh, I'll get the rent payment to you next week."

Ted says, "Don't worry about this month's rent... that's taken care of also. We'll start fresh with the new year. See ya.."

Timmy says, "Why are you crying, Mommy? God took care of everything, just like I knew he would."

"These are tears of happiness, Timmy. There's a big difference." Carol thinks a moment and then she says, "We'll go and get a Christmas tree, Timmy... we have enough money for a tree now."

"Don't worry, Mommy... God will give us a tree. We don't need to buy one. Wait until Christmas."

"That's tomorrow, Timmy... No one will be open tomorrow to buy a tree... it may be too late as it is now."

"It's okay, Mommy... God will take care of it."

The next morning, Christmas day, Carol is still asleep when Timmy and Tasha bounce into her bedroom. Timmy shouts, "Come see! Mommy, wake up and come see our Christmas tree... Hurry!!"

Carol allows herself to be dragged out of bed and while she rubs the sleep from her eyes, she is escorted and pushed to the kitchen window. Timmy yells, "See, Mommy... There's our tree in the back yard."

Carol looks out the window and sees the old evergreen bush sitting in the corner of the yard. The tree is full of red birds and blue birds sitting on the branches. Carol says, "I can't believe my eyes... Why, Timmy, that's the prettiest Christmas tree I've ever seen. The birds look like ornaments on a tree."

"See, Mommy... God gave us the bestest tree ever."

Dexter takes a bite of Jesus' birthday cake. It is chocolate with chocolate icing. He asks, "Jesus, do you always answer prayers like Timmy's"

"Yes, my son... when they are so full of faith... how can I do anything less."

"Happy Birthday, Jesus."

"Merry Christmas, my child."

***"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'
Matthew 25:40 NIV***

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A Time To Live

Visit Thirty-six

It is the last of summer and the lemon slush really 'hits the spot', 'fills the bill', and other like expressions. Megan slurps loudly as her straw cannot find any more slush to fill its circular mouth.

"Gross..., Megan, give it up. It's gone," Kim jokingly says.

"But it's so good. It went too fast... Let's get another."

"Can't... We've got to go. You know that. We're s'posed to be at the church in ten minutes. We'll come back after we finish." Kim gets up from her favorite seat in her favorite booth across from the counter at 'Charlies'; the drug store that makes the best lemon slushes in the world. Charlie is the absolute best; the greatest druggist-soda fountain-type genius in the universe.

Kim and Megan come to 'Charlies' every chance they have. It's the place in their small town where everyone converges daily. It's the place where Kim and Megan's high school buddies gather also. Charlies is located right on the square, down the street from the old courthouse, where Megan's father 'holds court' every day. He's the district judge for this county.

"I've got to fix my hair first," Megan says as she runs a brush through her long brown hair."

"We don't have time for all that. Megan, we've got to go... There won't be any boys at church now. They're over at the football field practicing."

"You don't know who you'll meet. What about Mike-y? I bet *he'll* be there."

"You're hopeless, girl... Let's go."

On the other side of town, a car leaves the interstate and slowly drives down Main street. Larue is looking for a place to rob. Larue is a thief and he needs money. He robbed a Dairy Delight store this morning at Murphy, a town two hundred miles to the west. The County Sheriff has his description and every law officer in the state is looking for Larue.

Larue stops his vehicle at the curb, a short distance from Charlies. He looks all around to see if any law is evident. This drug store looks like a good spot to hit. Larue believes this place will have a bunch of money. He rubs his two-day bearded chin in

thought and then pats his coat pocket to assure himself that the gun is still there. Larue is taking his time. There's no need to rush and foul things up. He'll wait for the lunch crowd to leave and activity to slow down.

Unseen by Larue, his silent companion, the evil spirit, Trimpit, is happy with the situation. He smiles at Larue and chuckles to himself. Things are going well.

A short dimension away we arrive in paradise; a place that is pure and true, a place that is heaven in every sense, a time in timelessness where we can rest from our weary journey down life's dreary, dusty and drought-stricken road. You can feel the love, the peace, the uplifting hope of the spirit that absorbs and surrounds your soul and wipes away the sweat of the battle and the tears of defeat.

The light is so bright that we shield our eyes until they adjust to the clarity of vision as our short-sightedness is vanquished to hell and our hearts are rejuvenated with the perfume of God's grace and mercy. We are looking at creation at its best and we realize we are actually looking into the face of God, the father.

We drop our false knowledge of corrupted intelligence, our foolish dogma and petty pride to take on the purple robe of a child's wisdom so our faith can be fulfilled and the mountains that separate us from our Creator are moved into the sea. Because we believe, we pass through the eye of the needle and embrace the light of hope and love. Our journey is complete, we have crossed the wide chasm of water that separates false from truth. We have returned to Eden. The bridge is Jesus; the only way to return to the Father.

In this land of forever, we see young boys and girls playing stickball or hopscotch or tag in the golden streets. Young couples walk hand in hand or kiss openly as they enjoy the beautiful flower gardens that overflow like rivers from the mountain of Blessings, situated in the middle of this older, more mature area of Eden. God's creative power has caressed this particular spot in heaven for many of our centuries. His spirit fills the air with the peaceful rhapsody of butterflies and our ears are washed with the loving music of hummingbirds.

We see an older man walking down a wide road to Evermore. This man has been in heaven hundreds of our years and his beard is sprinkled with gray as is his hair. He doesn't appear to be very old, perhaps in his fourth decade; it's so difficult to judge age in heaven.

A red cloth is tied about his head to hold his hair from his eyes. He wears the white robe of purity and his brown eyes sparkle with joy and peace that overflows from his heart.

The man stops at one of the many water wells that are situated throughout heaven. He pulls a freshly finished, hand-carved wooden ladle from the sack he is carrying. He replaces the old ladle in the water bucket that sits on the rock wall that encloses the well.

As he is about to leave and travel to the next well, he feels a touch on his arm. He turns to see Jesus and his heart overflows with joy. He exclaims, "Lord! You startled me. How may I serve?"

Jesus takes a seat on the rock wall. He says, "I believe I will have a drink. Will you join me, Jesse? How about resting here with me for a moment or two?"

"Oh, yes, Lord... I certainly would. I'm honored."

Jesse fills the ladle from the water bucket and hands it to Jesus. Jesus takes a long drink and returns the ladle to Jesse. Jesse gets his own drink and then sits beside Jesus. The water of life flows through his body and refreshes his spirit.

Jesus asks, "Will you take care of something for me, Jesse? I need you to return to the world and offer the water of life to someone that is in need. In so doing, you will also help Blasdon with his task."

"Again, you honor me, Lord..." Jesse hesitates and then asks, "Isn't Blasdon a guardian, Lord?"

"Yes, Jesse... he is." Jesus calls, "Blasdon! Jesse is ready."

Kim and Megan are walking up the street, back to Charlies'. They have been at church for about an hour and it's time for refreshments.

Kim is explaining, "Donovan means that we need to be bold in our witness. We've got to reach out to those that don't know Jesus."

"It's hard to do. I'm nervous whenever I try to talk about salvation and stuff like that. I don't feel like I'm good enough to be telling other people how to live."

Kim replies, "I feel the same way. We're not good... only Jesus is good. If we don't try to help others, then... they will... go to hell." Kim gives Megan a pamphlet. She continues, "All we've got to do is hand these out to everyone we meet."

Megan asks, "Where did you get this, Kim?"

"Off the table... at the back of the church."

Larue is getting out of his car as the girls are walking up the sidewalk toward Charlies. Kim says, "Now's your chance, Megan. Go for it, girl!"

Megan hesitates, but is pushed along by Kim. She exclaims, "Okay! Okay, Kim. I'm going... Quit shoving me."

Larue steps up onto the curb of the sidewalk as Megan confronts him. She says, "Here, Mister, this is for you. If you don't know Jesus, please read this... it tells you how to be saved and go to heaven... God..."

Larue glares at Megan as he takes the pamphlet. He interrupts her, "Git away from me, girl... I don't need.." He reaches out to push Megan away.

His arm is held in a strong grip. Larue turns to see a bearded man with a red cloth around his head. He is wearing a white shirt and jeans. The man says, "Mister, you need to read about the water of life that only Jesus can give." The man hands Larue a key chain that has a wooden ladle replica attached and a piece of paper containing the gospel message.

Larue feels a sudden fear of this bearded man. He backs away and says, "I'm in the middle of a bunch of 'Jesus freaks'. Go away! I'm not interested." As he turns, he throws the key chain and pamphlet to the ground and scurries up the street toward Charlies, in the next block.

Kim reaches down and picks up the key chain. She says, "Now, that went rather well... Don't you think? Here, Mister. This is yours."

Jesse says, "All we can do is offer salvation... It's a person's choice to accept or not. You can keep this... I have more."

"No... Thanks... Maybe you can give it to someone that doesn't know Jesus... I do. Thanks anyway. We're going to Charlies' to get a drink... Want to come?"

"Let's wait a minute or two more... Did you read what is attached to the key ring? It's a great message about Jesus and salva..."

Jesse is interrupted by a gunshot coming from up the street at the drug store. Megan exclaims, "What's that?!"

There's a lot of activity around Charlies. A number of sheriff deputies and patrons are running in and out of the drug store. This little town hasn't experienced this much excitement in a very long time.

Bill Miller, who owns a barber shop next to Charlies' runs down the sidewalk toward the two girls. He yells, "Don't go to Charlies, girls!... There's been a shootin! The Sheriff shot a thief... I'm going to get Doctor Blake."

Megan exclaims, "Wow! Let's go, Kim! Let's go see."

"No... Let's go across the street. We can see from there." Kim looks around and then asks, "Say! Where's the old guy that was handing out the wooden ladle-things?"

It's about six hours later, it's seven in the evening, and the activity around the drug store has died down. The investigation by the Sheriff's office revealed Larue's latest robbery spree. Law officers around the state are happy that this man is no longer a threat. Trimpit is happy as he drags Larue's evil soul to hell.

Kim picked up Megan at her home and they have come to Charlies for an after-dinner desert; a double-dip, double-chocolate-syruped, cherry topped banana split. They freeze as they come to their favorite booth across from the counter. There is that distinct yellow police investigation tape that encases the booth.

Kim looks at Charlie and he says, "Good thing you weren't here, Kim. The Sheriff's bullet went right through that thief and hit the spot where you would have been sitting."

Megan says, "Looks like God was looking out for you, Kim."

Kim exclaims, "Wow! You can say that again... I think we'll find a new favorite booth."

Jesse and Jesus are sitting on the rock wall of the well. They are sharing a drink of the water of life. Jesse says, "You did all you could, Jesus. He just wouldn't take your hand and accept your love and heaven."

"It's always sad for me to realize that I've lost one soul to Lucifer. Thank you though for your help in keeping my little ones safe." Jesus wipes the tears from his eyes. After a moment, he continues, "It was my hope Larue would identify with you and he might see something in you that he needed."

"You mean, Lord, because I was a thief like him and you gave me one last chance also."

"Yes... The only difference is that you recognized who I am as we hung on those cruel crosses and we came to heaven together. That made me very happy, my friend."

*Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,
but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.
Indeed, the water I give him will become in him
a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
John 4:13, 14*

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The Quest

Visit Thirty-seven

What a glorious day! The light from God's love that illuminates all of heaven is brilliant and warm to your face. The blue sky is filled with fluffy white clouds floating lazily from east to west and the many varieties of birds swoop and spiral and chase each other among the tall oak and pecan trees in this peaceful valley of Eden. The fragrance of roses, dandelions, honeysuckle and other flowers too numerous to name share the air with the familiar smell of fresh baked bread. Yes, the bread of life that provides strength and hope to the dying world is a refreshing snack to the children of God as they continue to grow in God's love.

A dirt road meanders through this beautiful area of heaven. On this road we see a young man walking and enjoying the scenic view. Curtis is twelve of the world's years and he hasn't been in heaven very long. He is eating some of the bread of life he was given at the stand just over the hill. Actually, he is sharing the bread with three persistent bluebirds that have been drawn to the delicious aroma.

Curtis says, "Hold on, Henry... Let me break off some. You, Julie, and Blake can share. Don't be such a hog, Blake... Let the others have a chance."

After his friends have had their fill and have flown to find other sources of entertainment or food, Curtis continues his journey toward the East gate. He is wearing an oversized coat of Grace and the crowns of life and service rest comfortably on his young head. A homemade wooden sword is stuck in his belt and a shield that resembles a trash can lid is attached to a rope sling on his back.

Curtis is on a quest; a mission that he feels is necessary, a mission to set things right. Of course, he didn't tell anyone where he is going. He knew they would attempt to stop him and he feels he must do this task. It is something he needs to do. He is taking long confident strides as he travels toward his goal.

"May I help you, God's-child?"

Curtis is startled by the voice of his good friend, Blasdon. He turns to see the strong angel walking up to him. He replies, "This is something I need to do, my friend. Don't try to stop me."

"I don't want to stop you, Curtis. I just want to help you be all you can be in heaven."

"Well, you can help me get to that 'in-between' or 'desolate' place you told me about. It's called 'Armon-getty' or something like that."

Blasdon replies, "Armageddon... That's the place... I can help you go there, but why would you want to go? It's nothing like heaven and it's very dangerous. Evil lurks behind every rock and bush. The devil and his lackeys wander through that land... the evil outskirts of the world before you reach the gates of hell. God's angels only go there rarely... in an emergency. We'll go there to fight the final battle when Jesus gives the command.

"Well, I want to go there anyway. I have a task to complete and I need to get it done."

Blasdon looks into the eyes of this child of God and replies, "Jesus said for me to take you if you felt the need and to help you after we arrive, if necessary."

"I'm ready and waiting. This is something I must do."

"Hold to my hand and shut your eyes, God's child. The distance is not so great."

Curtis grabs Blasdon's hand and shuts his eyes. He has the impression of lifting off the ground and then rapid movement as he feels wind on his face. The brightness of light is apparent even through his closed eyes. The two travel to the bleak and lonely place in a matter of a few world seconds.

Curtis opens his eyes as his feet touch the ground. He exclaims as he looks about him, "Blasdon! This place feels so... so... "

"Evil," Blasdon completes his sentence. "This place is evil. Every time I come here I get a very uncomfortable feeling. Are you certain you must do this, God's child? We can go home and get a baseball or basketball game going. How that sound?"

"You go home, Blasdon... I'll come later. I must find him... It's very important to me, but you needn't stay. I'll be all right."

"Jesus said you would be determined and he also said that I am to stay with you. I can do nothing less. I still don't like being here."

"Me either... Let's go."

Curtis starts walking and Blasdon follows closely behind him. They walk toward a dark hill in the distance that they can see in the gray half-light. Curtis feels as if he is being drawn or led by some unseen force. Curtis looks about him as he walks. The ground is barren and black in color. The huge cracks in the ground are evidence that no rain ever nourishes the dirt of this forgotten area; no vegetation of any kind could grow here. The sky is a dark gray and dark ominous clouds hint of impending doom. He listens, but no sound of birds or any other of God's creatures can be heard. The silence is very loud and disturbing. There is also a distinct odor; a familiar and detestable smell that might come from a sewer.

"This really is a fitting place for a demon; a perfect home for a heartless soul. Not the one the devil presents to the world, but the one his friends find when they die."

Blasdon remarks, "And this isn't even hell... think what it must be like."

Curtis shivers and replies, "I don't want to think of that."

The two heavenly friends continue their journey across this foul land as Curtis resumes his quest. The quicker he completes his task, the sooner they can return to a much better place.

Frank is sitting at the kitchen table. It is very late at night; about two in the morning actually. Frank hasn't been able to sleep very well lately. He is thumbing through his bible. Tears are filling his eyes and spilling down his face.

He quietly mumbles, "Lord, why Curtis? He was so young, so full of You. He could have done so much in your service. I just don't understand... help me understand why. I get so mad sometimes... Why did you take my little boy? What did I do that was so bad that he had to suffer for it? Are you there, God? Please talk to me."

Frank lowers his head to rest on his arms as he sobs softly.

The two demons are very happy. They are bending close to Frank on either side as he sits at the table. Miltross and Zebret have been whispering to Frank and suggesting that somehow it is Frank's fault that Curtis had died. The demons of guilt and doubt are having a good time.

Miltross says, *"It's going well, don't you think?"*

Zebret nods, but he replies, *"If only he would stop praying. I get the willies when they do that. Tell him it won't do him any good. Tell him the Enemy isn't listening to him."*

"I know what I'm doing... I'll do that soon. You do your job and I'll do mine."

Curtis can make out a figure in the distance. As they get closer, the figure takes the shape of a man. The man is sitting on the dark, cold ground.

As Curtis stands over the man, he thinks to himself, 'What a poor miserable being'.

The man appears to be about middle-age, maybe forty in world years, but Curtis can't see too much because of the man's bowed head. The man doesn't move except for an occasional deep sigh that moves his chest and shoulders up and down. His whole body shudders and a mournful sound comes from his soul.

"Hey! Man! Look at me!"

The man slowly raises his head. Curtis is startled to view a miserable face with lines and wrinkles and a gray, chalky complexion. Huge cancerous sores and bores that cover its face drain a yellowish smelly fluid. The corners of his mouth are turned down in a sad heartbroken scowl and the eyes are a sightless white.

The man says, "Yes, master, I'm here. What can I do for you?"

Curtis replies, "I'm not your master... I'm looking for... your friend, your guide or whatever you call him."

"Oh, you must mean Ortrum. Ortrum is my friend; has been for many, many years... maybe forever." The man attempts what might be considered a laugh, but he chokes and vomits green slime that runs down his chin and drops like hot grease to sizzle on the parched soil of misery.

Curtis feels sick. Blasdon touches his shoulder and says, "Do you want to leave this place? You don't have to do this, God's child."

Curtis looks at his friend and replies, "Yes I do, Blasdon... I really have to do this."

Curtis says to the man, "Send for your Ortrum... I want to speak to Ortrum."

A voice deep from within the man's heart asks, "Who calls Ortrum? Why am I disturbed in my pleasure?"

"Come out, Ortrum... I want to talk to you."

The man emits a hideous cry and his body shakes violently. A green vapor flows from the man's mouth. The vapor takes on the shape of a man. This demon is huge and his arm and leg muscles bulge with the strength of a thousand horses. The demon says, "Well, here I am. Why do you call me from my pleasure? Why... I know who you are..."

you're Curtis. What do you want?"

"I want you to leave my dad alone. Quit tormenting him."

The demon hisses between sharp-pointed teeth, "And why should I do what a tiny human tells me to do? I'm just doing what my master has instructed me to do, no more, no less."

"Well, this child of God tells you to stop and MY Lord and King will help me destroy you if you don't."

Blasdon interrupts, "Be careful, God's child. I don't know if that's what the Lord wants."

Curtis continues staring at the mighty demon, but he replies to Blasdon, "Well, my friend, I know." To Ortrum he asks, "What is your response? Do you stop your evil work or do you seek non-existence for all eternity?"

"I can not stop. It's what I do... The world is a battlefield and we are fighting constantly to stop the Enemy and obtain control. We do what we've done since the beginning of time... make His creations, the pitiful, little humans, doubt their creator. It appears this fight with you will continue now and we'll see who stops who."

The demon reaches for Curtis, but Blasdon steps in between the two adversaries. Ortrum swings a huge fist and strikes Blasdon on the side of his head. The mighty angel is dazed, but he is able to throw up the protection of his shield of faith to deflect the blow of the demon's sword. The force of the blow however causes the shield to hit Blasdon on the side of his head and knocks him to his knees. Blasdon is defenseless as Ortrum raises his sword for a final strike.

Curtis yells as he places his body in front of his friend, "Stop, demon! Your fight is with me, not my Guardian... Unless you are afraid of one of God's children."

"My, my, aren't we brave... You think I'm afraid of you?" Ortrum points at the human sitting on the ground. He continues, "I wasn't afraid when I told this miserable, cowardly human to go to your church building and kill as many of the Enemy's children as he could. He should have done more if it wasn't for Guardians like this Blasdon, but he was weak. He took his own life when he faced the enemy. But before he did, he killed you... Why should I fear you or your miserable excuses for weapons?"

Curtis replies, "Because I've been cleansed by the blood of Christ and Jesus lives within my heart. Because of what Jesus did for me on the cross and because I asked him to save me, I have been made righteous before God as he forgave all my sins. Because of the grace that fills my soul and flows through my veins like blood gives me the power of God's mighty angels. It's the spirit of God that will give me the victory over puny demons like you, Ortrum. You are nothing in the sight of God and I've judged you and

found you worthy of eternal death... That's why, demon. That's why you should fear me... Jesus."

At the name of Jesus, fear comes to the eyes of the demon. He screams, "Don't say that name! It pierces my being... it strangles my soul!"

Ortrum swings his mighty sword, but Curtis easily deflects the blow with his shield and he thrust his wooden sword into the demon's chest. The sword is transformed into mighty steel forged by a million angels and sanctified by the spirit of God. The sword cuts easily through the chest armor of the demon. He slowly falls to his knees and Curtis leans close to the foul mouth of his enemy. He says, "By the power of Jesus, Ortrum, you cease to exist here or forever. Before you go, tell your orderlies in the world to leave my dad alone. Do you hear me, demon?"

Ortrum's eyes glaze over as he slowly falls forward. He whispers before he hits the ground, "As you wish... it will be done."

Curtis helps Blasdon to his feet. They both watch as the demon slowly is transformed into a green mist that dissolves into nothing in a short while. Curtis asks, "Are you all right, my friend?"

Blasdon replies, "Yes, Curtis, I'm fine. You were great... You finished the demon... you conquered him."

"Jesus did it, Blasdon. He granted my request and He helped me conquer evil."

Curtis feels a tug at the sleeve of his robe. He turns to see the man reaching up from his kneeling position. Curtis says, "I'm sorry for you, but I can't help. I forgive you for what you did, but that doesn't do you any good. You chose the evil to reside in your heart and keep you from the salvation of God through his son, Jesus. You may have thought you were killing me, but I belong to God and my life belongs to Him. All you did was move me into his loving arms and the rewards that awaited me in heaven. What have you got?"

Blasdon interrupts, "We need to go, little one. I feel evil returning for this soul. We need to go home."

Curtis takes Blasdon's hand and prepares to return to heaven. He says to the lost soul, "I'm so very sorry for your choice to reject God. All you can do is think on your choice for all eternity. Good-bye."

As Curtis and Blasdon's images disappear on their journey back home, the man slowly sinks to the ground once again. He sobs softly at first, then loudly. He feels the demons as they reach for him. He knows the torment will be severe, but only enough to make him miserable. ***If only he had made the right choice. If only he had taken the offered gift of love. If only...***

Inspired by those brave young people from Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas who God gathered into His loving arms and they now enjoy the blessings and fulfillment of heaven.

Don't be left behind.
You will if you don't know Jesus.
Don't make the wrong choice. Jesus is calling. He is knocking at the door to your heart.
None of us have any guarantee of how much time we have here in the world.
Don't take the chance. This is the biggest decision of your life... grab on to Jesus.
God is reaching for you in love. Don't reject him again.
Don't be left behind.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
For since death came through a man,
the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.
For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God!
He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 55-56

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The Wolf's Breath

Visit Thirty-eight

The faint sound of the wolf's cry is carried on the subtle spring breeze that gently travels down the rock strewn mountain slopes. It tiptoes past the pine trees at the foot of the mountain and skips across the peaceful flowing stream that wanders through the green valley. The pack's shapes and shadows can be seen slithering through the moonlight as they seek their prey.

Jules heart skips a beat when his ears pick up the distinct voice of the demons. He assumes or rather, hopes the pack is headed away from him, to the other side of the mountain, toward some other soul. He wants to continue his leisurely pursuit of a large mouth bass just out of sight behind a submerged log a dozen feet away from his secret spot on the west bank of the wide stream at the edge of the beautiful garden.

He has worked his cork to just the right location next to the log and he thinks he has estimated correctly the depth of his hook to entice the big bass to nibble at his last meal. Jules says out loud, "Come on, come to papa, my friend".

Jules hears the howl of the wolves again and he feels the breath on his neck; a shiver runs up his spine. He exclaims, "They're getting closer... they *are* coming for ME!" He wipes the sweat from his palms on his jeans. Jules continues his chosen task of catching the wayward fish.

The sound of the pack is very close. Jules can hear their snarling and fighting just beyond the edge of the forest on the east bank of the stream. In a moment, he sees five wolves emerge from the trees. Four of the beasts are still nipping and fighting among themselves. The leader pays no attention. His sight is on Jules across the stream. The beast's eyes are brilliant red and can pierce to the heart of man. Their eyes lock and Jules can hear the wolf leader speak to his mind. "Jules, my son, you are fishing in MY stream. To fish here you must become one of us. Weren't you told this by your Father?" The breath is hot on Jules' neck.

*"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"
Genesis 3:1b*

"No! I can fish anywhere. I don't have to become like you. Father said I will die if I do."

The wolf leader appears to laugh. His words flood into Jules' mind. "You won't die. Your Father knows if you become one of us you will see and know everything and be like Him. Come now and join us. Give up the image and be like us."

"You will not surely die..... For God knows that when you

*eat of it your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
Genesis 3:4*

Jules closes his eyes and tries to free his mind of the enticing images and pretty words of the beast. But he reasons, 'Why not? I'll just try it for a little while and see how I like it. Everyone is doing it... all my friends are there.' The Wolf's breath is unbearable.

Jules ingests the seed of sin and it sprouts in his heart. He finds that his appearance is like a wolf and he is drawn to the pack on the other side of the wide stream, east of the garden. The leader smiles and gives Jules a welcoming lick on the mouth. The beast turns and leads his pack of fools into the forest.

Jules continues with the pack for a season. The wolf pack has grown and many members compete for the favor of the leader. Jules has received many rewards and also a number of battle scars over his time with the pack. He is responsible, by his example and enticement, for many of his companions to be drawn to the surly and crupt group.

The pack roams throughout the mountains and valleys east of the garden by night and they sleep during the daylight. The light hurts their eyes, but they love the darkness.

One day the pack is awakened from their sleep. There in their presences is a pure white lamb. The leader turns to Jules and says, "This is your fault. Your Father has sent this creature, this special part of Himself, because you gave up the image. Prove your allegiance to me by killing it. I cannot defile myself with its purity."

Jules slowly advances toward the lamb. He snarls and bares his teeth so as to see fear in the lamb's eyes. Jules is surprised that the lamb isn't afraid, but he only looks deep into Jules' eyes with love and compassion. Jules hesitates and he looks back at the pack and his leader.

They respond, "Kill him! Kill him!" Their voices become louder and louder. The wolf's breath is hot on the back of his neck.

Jules turns and leaps onto the lamb out of blind obedience. He grabs the innocent and righteous gift by the throat and in an instant has achieved his evil purpose. Purity and love lay dead at his feet.

The leader says, "Well done... Place it on that large rock for all to see that knowledge triumphs over wisdom and that the image is dead."

Jules does as he is directed and he places the limp, bleeding lamb on the high rock. He sees the sacred blood flow down the rock and onto the ground. Jules moves back as the blood appears to be coming toward him. He turns and flees toward the east. The sounds of his friends' laughter and ridicule fill his ears.

*For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.
John 3:16*

Jules wanders for many days and nights with heavy guilt clinging to his heart like a leach. His wanderings bring him once again to the peaceful stream that separates false from truth. He yearns for the peace and love just beyond the far shore. His sin is so great and he knows the evil in his heart makes it impossible for him to once again achieve the blessings enjoyed so long ago.

Heartbroken, Jules turns from the stream, to return to his lifeless wanderings. Wait! He hears someone call his name. "Jules... Jules... come to me, Jules."

Jules turns and sees the lamb standing a few feet away. He exclaims, "This cannot be! I killed you... I saw the blood! This is impossible...! I killed the Father's son."

"No, Jules... I gave my life for you. The Father sent me to take your place, to take your sins on myself, to die for you... This is the plan for you to regain the image you have lost... to return to the garden where you have always belonged."

Jules reaches out to the lamb and he cries, "Please forgive me for all I've done... Cleanse my soul of the impurities I have devoured and savored. Though undeserved, I cherish your love for me. Please make me whole again."

When Jules touches the lamb, he feels the chaff being purged from his heart to reveal the wheat of life that had been strangled and left to die in the soil of his soul. He feels the loving embrace of his Father once again and smells the sweet fragrance of mercy that he had almost forgotten.

He and the Son float over the stream of division to once again walk together in the beauty of the garden. The image has returned and he reflects God's love for all to see.

Another season has passed and Jules is once again at peace, fishing at his favorite spot next to the stream. He is startled to hear again the cry of the wolf pack drifting on the evening breeze.

He sees the leader emerge from the trees and he feels the breath on his neck. Jules is once again enticed away from the Father's haven and he emerges his soul in the impurities of the wolf's filthy thoughts and deeds.

Jules continues with the pack for six days. The enjoyment he once felt as he wallowed in the muck of sin isn't as sweet as before. He no longer can devour the entrails of the fatted calf of life. What he sees as he looks at his reflection in the further-side stream is sickening and revolting.

On the seventh day, Jules is tired and sick at heart. He cries, "Lord God, forgive me for my weakness and let me return to your side, to your great heart."

Jules' heart is at once washed in the blood of the lamb and peace again floods his soul. He sheds his animal desires and lusts to walk upright in the sight of his God again. He is drawn to eternal rest and love. The tears that stream down his face are of joy not sadness. He says, "Thank you, Lord, for your unfailing love. Thank you for letting me return to you."

God replies, "My son, nothing could ever separate us once you made the choice. You weren't really gone."

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8: 38-39

Jules continues for many seasons in the loving embrace of his savior. He spends his time telling the pack members of God's love and plan for their lives. Jules is responsible for many giving up that shallow existence and returning to rest in the peace of God's forgiveness.

The pack leader is furious. His breath is burning hot on Jules' neck. The wolf grabs Jules by the throat. The voice of the wolf penetrates Jules' brain, "Stop what you are doing and return to me and you will live. If you do not, you surely will die."

Jules prays, "Lord Jesus, help me to resist this temptation and this adversary."

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7b

At once, Jules feels the peace and joy of God fill his mind and purge the evil that attempts to again settle there. His soul returns again to the peaceful haven of the further shore, in the garden.

*We are no more responsible for the evil thoughts
that pass through our minds than a scarecrow
for the birds which fly over the seed plot he has
to guard. The sole responsibility in each case
is to prevent them from settling.
John Churton Collins: Maxims and Reflections*

The wolf leader snarls and bares his teeth at Jules from across the stream. He slowly turns and swiftly trots into the trees with his companions close behind. Jules no longer feels the hot breath on his neck. He sees the gravestone marking the resting place of his physical being.

Jules says, "Thank you, Lord, for revealing the struggles of my life in that dimension. I'm sorry for letting you down in so many ways. How could you love such a fool? I failed you on so many occasions. With all you have why did you give your all for me? I didn't deserve your love."

"No one deserves the love I have for them. You were created to walk with me in the Garden. You were created in My image. I wanted you back again to share all of creation and to be with me forever. I gave my best so you could come back to us. I, also, gave you free-will to choose who you would serve; Me or Satan. You chose to return to the Garden and all we have together. You are reborn into eternity. No more will the wolf's breath be felt on your neck. You are at home in My heart forever.

*Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.
Luke 10:3*

In your walk through this world

*and if you are one of God's adopted children,
you will feel the wolf's breath in times
of temptation and adversity.*

*Hold on to Jesus
and you'll rest in eternal peace
where the breath will be felt no more.*

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear,
but you received the Spirit of sonship.*

Romans 8:15a

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A Sinner's Reward

Visit Thirty-nine - an Easter Story

That day is a little foggy. I don't remember too much about what happened. I remember a doctor and some nurses working over me, but then they were gone. There was this bright light and an impression of a long tunnel. I felt so strange, so detached. I had this feeling of peace and happiness, a lightness of spirit, an unexplained joy. I felt like the child I had once been.

Once through the tunnel, I was standing beside a wide body of water, maybe a lake or sea. I wasn't alone; there were many, many of us and we were just standing and waiting on the shore. Waiting for what I don't know, just waiting. It was dark and cold where we were, but across this water, on the other side, was light. The light was such a contrast to this present place. It was so bright and so... compelling, beckoning, happy, warm. I wanted so to be there to soak in its beauty and to share in its happiness.

There was no boat. It seemed to me that we needed a boat to get across this wide lake, to get to the other side. What am I to do?

It was then that I noticed across the lake, in the brightness, a figure like unto a man. He was stretching out his arms toward me. He wanted me to come to him. I knew it was God; the keeper of eternity, the ruler of all creation and the fifth dimension.

I took a step out onto the water. This isn't so difficult. I can do this. I looked around and a number of souls had joined me, had taken that first step. Together we took a second, then a third step. We were walking on the water. I was happy. I was going to the place of my hope and dreams, the place called heaven.

Everything got fuzzy, hazy then, like taking your glasses off... it got blurred. When it became clear again, I noticed I was behind some of the souls. I tried to hurry and catch up, but my feet seemed to be restricted by the water. I looked down and my feet were six inches below the surface. What is happening to me?

Ever so slowly I was sinking. The water crept up to my knees and then my waist. I looked around and there were others in my same predicament. But, then there were others that continued their journey toward the light and the distant shore. They weren't sinking, but remained on the surface and had no difficulty in their progress.

I reached up toward the sky and the shore. I yelled, "Lord! Lord, save me!"

The reply was the saddest words I ever heard. "You never knew me... I don't know you."

...I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Matthew 7: 23b NIV

It was the judgment of truth. The indictment was true. My fate was sealed. I ceased my struggle and I slowly slipped lower and lower in the water. I could see that some of the souls had made it to the far shore and were greeted by friends and relatives. It was strange that I could even see the tears traversing down the face of the one with outstretched arms as he watched me descend. He was the last thing I saw as I dropped beneath the surface of the water.

For the wages of sin is death... Romans 6:23a

I am falling through a murky, gray nothingness. At first, I held my breath for as long as I could. When I could stand it no longer and it felt like my lungs would explode, I exhaled and took a breath, thinking this is it; I'm a goner, let's get it over with. To my surprise, I could breath in this... whatever it was. I slowly came to the realization that this isn't going to end; this is what I will always have... nothing, forever.

I continue to fall. Not fast, but very slowly, like in slow motion. What is worse is I am alone; I don't see or hear anyone else, only my crying is heard. Not only that, but I feel alone. The feeling of being alone is all I can feel. The fatal reality of eternal separation; the hopelessness of the lonely, the finality of it all. I've never felt this way before.

Then these images start to appear in my mind and project before my eyes. It is like a movie or television. I reach out, but I can never feel anything; I reach right through them. The images are so real and familiar. The first is a time when I am very young and my mother is talking to me.

"Jerry, there will come a time when God will be talking to your heart... It will be a feeling more than anything else. I want you to listen to your heart and do what you think is right. Remember, God loves you and wants you to be one of his children."

That image would be gone only to be replaced shortly by another of a time in church, actually, in Sunday School one Easter. My teacher, Mrs. Finney, is telling the story of Jesus dying on the cross and then how he arose on that special Sunday so long ago. She said he died for us, because we are sinners and now we could be his children again.

"Jesus died for you and all you have to do is ask him to forgive you of your sins and to come into your heart... and he will."

The scene shifts again to a worship service, I believe that same day. I'm sitting next to mom and dad listening to our pastor, Brother Buttral, as he preaches about the gift of God that was given that first Easter.

...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23b

I remember that I felt God calling to me... talking to my heart as I listened to that preacher. I said in my heart that I wanted Jesus to forgive me and to come into my heart... **and... and... you did!...**

"Yes I did, my son."

The scene changed in an instant. I wasn't alone anymore. In fact, I wasn't in that murky nothingness, but sitting beside Jesus on a grassy hillside among the Blue Bonnets and Indian Paintbrush wildflowers. The sun is so bright that it almost hurts my eyes, but I see so clearly. The fragrance of love fills my soul with the sweet joy of God's presence.

Jesus continues, "You asked what it would have been like if you hadn't accepted my love and become one of my children. I showed you the experience of the second death... You didn't actually have any problem crossing the sea of separation, but I showed you the reward you would have received if you hadn't taken my hand that special Easter morning."

"I do know you and... you know me. I also know that as a sinner I deserve that second death... deserved isolation from you and your fulfillment of hope."

"But because we do know each other... my son, your reward is life... and all eternity awaits you... that is the reward of a redeemed sinner. And we will be together forever. Here comes a few friends to welcome you to our heaven."

I look down the hill and I see, "Mom!... Dad!... Mrs. Finney!... Brother Buttral! And I see more friends and relatives coming up the hill. There are so many that are responsible for showing me the path to heaven; the way back to God."

*My sheep listen to my voice;
I know them and they follow me.
I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;
no one can snatch them out of my hand.
John 10: 27, 28 NIV*

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Cara's Hope

Visit Forty - A Christmas Story

The snow is falling fast and the wind sounds mad because it is howling as it pushes and shoves its way through the limbs of the oak trees outside Cara's home. Cara is sitting on the sofa in her living room. She looks about the cheerfully decorated room. The large green wreath with tiny figurines and pine cones hangs over the fireplace. Three large stockings hang from the mantle; Cara's is the newest one with a picture of Santa embroidered by her grandmother for Cara's first Christmas three years ago.

The tree by the corner window with its blinking and twinkling lights is a lighthouse, sending a message for the outside to see that happiness and love abound in this home. Cara smiles as she sees the silver tinsel draped over the limbs. Her daddy tickled her nose with that tinsel when they decorated the tree on Thanksgiving day.

It's Christmas Eve and Cara wishes her daddy was home. She squeezes Bertie, her stuffed bunny, a little tighter. Her daddy has gone far away to do something for his work. He's supposed to be home any minute to read her a night-night story. She has the book right next to her on the sofa and she already has her 'jamas on and her blanket and everything. Where is my daddy? Cara's bottom lip starts to quiver.

"He'll be home soon, Cara. Just you wait." Blasdon whispers in her ear.

"Oh, Yellow Bear, I'm glad you came. Where's my daddy?" To Cara, the yellow blond color of Blasdon's hair, beard and forearms made him look like a yellow bear.

"He's on his way home. It's just taking longer and it's harder with the snow."

Cara hears the phone in the kitchen ring and her mommy's voice as she answers it. "Bobby, I've been worried. Where are you? Oh, Bobby, I was afraid this would happen... going that far right before Christmas. What are you going to do? Now you be careful... We're fine here and we know you'll get here if you can. Don't take any chances... do you hear me, sweetheart? It's a bad storm. We love you... "

Her mother comes into the living room after hanging up the phone. She says, "Cara, your daddy is stuck in a town about twenty miles away... the car broke down. He's going to try and get a ride somehow, but I'm afraid he might not make it until late tomorrow if then. It will be hard to find someone to come out on Christmas Eve, especially in this bad storm."

"It'll be all right, Mommy. Bear says that Daddy will be here soon."

"Oh... your imaginary friend says that does he. Well, I hope he knows what he's talking about. It's time for bed, sweetheart."

"Please... Please! Mommy! Let me stay up just a little longer. Daddy's suspos'd to read to me like he always does. I've got the book and everything... Please Mommy!"

Cara's mother looks down at the pleading face of her baby and says, "Well, okay... For just a little bit longer, Cara... I just don't want you getting your hopes up. It might be impossible for your daddy to get here because of the storm. He'll probably make it when the snow lets up... maybe late tomorrow. The roads will be terrible until they plow them."

"I've got to do some things in the kitchen to get ready for tomorrow... Your grandmother is coming for lunch. Tomorrow will be an exciting day... You'll get to open presents and everything. I can hardly wait."

"I'll just rest my eyes, Mommy...Daddy will be here soon."

Blasdon is on bended knees. He is trying to explain to Jesus, "Lord, I'm sorry... Her hope was so great and her tears so many... I spoke without thinking. I couldn't stand to see her unhappy. Forgive me, Lord."

Jesus reaches for his servant and lifts him to his feet. He says, "Your heart is full of love and I wouldn't have it any other way. You spoke from your heart out of concern for Cara. However, you shouldn't be concerned, my friend. I knew of the difficulty and have chosen one of our children to help us."

"Who, Lord?"

"Lawrence says he'll help us... Lawrence!"

In an instant, a man who appears to be in his late forties is standing beside Jesus. He says, "Yes, Jesus."

"Are you ready, my son?"

"Yes, Lord... I'm ready."

"Good... You go with Blasdon and both of you hurry back... The Celebration will begin soon and I need you with me."

Bobby is looking despairingly out the window of the service station. The snow continues to fall like a curtain. You can hardly see ten feet through the multitude of large crystals.

He asks the manager, "Is there anyone in town that will drive me to Kingston? I'll pay top dollar... I really need to get home."

"Are you crazy, man!? Look at that snow... it's a blizzard... it's the worstest storm I can ever remember. There ain't nobody go'na get out and drive anywhere tonight... or probably tomorrow. Why you'd both get stuck in some snow drift before you went a mile and freeze to death. Just settle down in that chair and you can stay with me until the storm's over."

"You don't understand... It's Christmas Eve and my little girl is expecting me home. I need to get there tonight. I'll rent your car... any car... I've got a hundred dollars... I'll bring it back tomorrow... or the day after. Please, mister."

"I don't want your money, mister... If I rented you a car it would be like murder... It may be only twenty miles, but you wouldn't make it... It's too dangerous and deadly. Don't be a fool, man... It's better to get home safely tomorrow than to lose it tonight. Come on... You got a warm place here to ride out this storm... you were lucky to get here anyway. The plows will be out tomorrow if the snow lets up... I'll call the highway guys in the morning and, even though it's Christmas, they'll clear the road at least to Kingston."

"No! I've got to get home tonight. Thanks for your help..." With that, Bobby opens the door and steps out into the blinding snow.

"Come back, mister... Don't be foolish. It's too bad to go anywhere... You can't walk twenty miles in this storm."

Bobby disappears into the falling crystals as he struggles through the snow that is about six inches deep and getting deeper. The service station man shakes his head, feeling perplexed. He reaches for the phone to call the sheriff. Much to his grief, he finds that his phone is dead.

He has been struggling through the blinding storm for what it seems to him like hours. The snow is deeper and he is getting exhausted. Bobby knows he is going the right way since he found a highway sign that pointed to Kingston, only eighteen miles away.

He says to himself, "I've got to keep going... Please, Lord God, help me make it home."

Pretty soon, Bobby can't go on any further. He falls into the snow and although he tries, he is unable to get to his feet.

He lays in the snow for what seems like an hour. His weak attempts to even raise his head are futile.

He is startled as he feels someone placing their arms under his arms and pulling him to his feet. Bobby can hardly see the face of the person helping him. The person says, "Let's go, Bobby... There's a car over here."

Bobby can barely make out a dark blue Chevrolet with a "Taxi" sign on the roof setting nearby. There is a man with long blond hair and a beard driving. The person helps Bobby into the back seat of the taxi and then he goes to a dump truck with a snow plow on the front. He gets in, starts up the truck and begins clearing the way for the taxi. The taxi driver doesn't say a word to Bobby as he drives.

Bobby is so tired from his exertion, he falls asleep. Before he knows it, the blond taxi driver is helping him to his front door. The driver rings the doorbell and walks away.

The door opens and his wife exclaims, "Bobby!!! How did you get here so fast? It's only been about twenty minutes since you called. The news on television says the roads are impassable."

Bobby replies, "I took that taxi..." He turns to point toward the road, but the cab is not to be seen. He asks out loud to no one in particular, "Now where did he go so fast? And where is that snow plow?"

He turns as he hears a familiar voice, "Daddy! Daddy! you got home for Christmas!"

In spite of being exhausted, Bobby scoops Cara up into his arms and replies, "I had to... I didn't want to disappoint my two favorite girls. Let's go read your book so you can get some sleep and be rested for tomorrow."

After reading to Cara and tucking her into bed, Bobby is getting ready for a well-deserved sleep himself. He remarks, "You know, Karen, Cara told me someone named "Bear" told her I would be coming home. What's that all about?"

"Bear is her imaginary friend. She calls him 'Yellow Bear' because he has yellow hair all over his face and arms."

"Is that normal? I don't remember having an imaginary friend when I was little."

"I bet you did. I remember mother telling me that I had one as a child. It's okay. The 'friend' goes away as a child gets older."

Bobby is thoughtful for a moment. He then says, "Karen, you'll think I'm crazy, but the snow plow guy looked like dad." He spots Karen's facial expression and continues, "I told you you would think I'm crazy."

"I think you were exhausted and the snow was blinding you... Lawrence ran the plows down this road for so many years and I think your mind or your eyes played tricks on you. Your dad has been... with Jesus... for ten years."

Bobby joins his wife in bed. He says, "I know you're right... It just seems that he looked like dad. That can't be though... just someone who looks like him." Bobby looks at his watch and remarks, "It's tomorrow... Merry Christmas, Baby!"

"Merry Christmas, Sweetheart."

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
Psalm 62: 5-6

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Made in Heaven

Visit Forty-one - A Mother's Day Story

Heaven's 'baby-place' is full of new souls waiting for their time to enter the world. The nursery is not unlike any that you might find in most hospitals in the world, but this nursery has angels and God's children taking care of the little ones instead of nurses. Each little soul lays in its own crib on a soft white baby sheet and is wrapped in a pink or blue blanket depending on whether its a boy or girl.

Mydrid, the head angel in charge, is checking her clipboard and making certain each soul is accounted for and being cared for properly. This is a big responsibility because the 'baby place' holds a special place in the heart of God. Mydrid wants everything to be just right and no problems.

She sees Horance, a man; one of God's children, picking up a baby and she yells excitedly, "What are you doing, Horance? Where are you going with..." She consults her clipboard and continues, "with Jonathan?"

Horance replies, "Jesus wants him. He sent me to get Jonathan."

"I didn't get any instructions... I really need some paperwork for these removals. After all, it's my neck if anything happens."

"I am to convey Jesus' apologies for not getting documentation to you, but something just came up and I couldn't complete everything and wait to go through normal channels. I'm coming back for Molly over there in crib number twelve in just a little bit. Will that be a problem?"

Mydrid makes a notation on her clipboard and replies, "No... It's fine... I'll take care of the paperwork. Just you be careful with them. And get them back as soon as Jesus is finished. We do have schedules to meet."

"Yes, Mydrid. I'll be very careful."

Jesus is waiting patiently in a green meadow filled with wild flowers in full bloom. There are several angels and humans waiting with him. Each one has a baseball glove and they are playing catch while they wait. There are volleyball and basketball courts set up in the meadow also.

Horance finally arrives with Jonathan. He gives the baby to Jesus. Jesus holds Jonathan up in the air and proclaims, "Jonathan, my son, you will be going into the world in a short while and we need to get you prepared."

Jesus places the baby on the ground and at once he changes into a young boy of about eight world-years. Jesus hands the boy a glove and bat. He says, "Jonathan, these friends of ours are going to teach you how to play the game of baseball. This will be your special talent and you will become very, very good at it. What do you think?"

"I don't know, but it looks like fun. I think I'll like it."

"Good! When you're finished here, you'll go to piano and voice lessons. Remember, Jonathan, you will have these talents, but it depends on you how they are used if you use them at all."

"I'll remember, Jesus."

"That's good. Now, go and play... Horance is back with Molly."

Jonathan runs to the talent instruction team to begin his baseball lessons. Jesus turns his attention to the little baby girl Horance has brought. He exclaims, "Molly, my Molly, you are going to be so special in the world." He places the baby on the ground and she turns into a young girl of seven world years. Jesus continues, "You will go to art lessons after awhile, but first, I think you should learn to play volleyball..."

Molly interrupts, "Jesus, can I go play with Jonathan? I like Jonathan."

"I know you do, Molly," Jesus says as he rubs his bearded chin. He continues, "Yes. You may play with Jonathan, but you won't have as much instruction time to learn your talent of volleyball. It's your decision, Molly."

Molly thinks for a moment and replies, "I think I want to play with Jonathan, Jesus. If it's okay."

Jesus laughs and replies, "Of course, it's okay. Run and have fun, little one. Go play with Jonathan."

As they watch the two children play, Horance remarks to his Lord, "Does that affect your plans, Jesus?"

"It will be fine, Horance... It will be just fine."

A number of world years have passed and we find ourselves in the world at a playground in a neighborhood park. Boys and girls are running and playing as their parents watch from picnic tables or become participants in various games with their children. It is a spring day and the weather is perfect; only friendly, puffy white clouds are floating in the blue sky.

Leslie is clearing the table and placing the leftovers and the picnic utensils back in the basket. She is watching her husband, Michael, playing catch with their son a short distance away. She completes her task and as she turns, she bumps into a little girl standing beside her.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sweetheart. I didn't see you."

A young woman approaches and says, "Molly, what are you doing? You were with us and then you were gone. Don't bother the lady."

Leslie says, "Oh, she's not bothering me. Hi... My name is Leslie Brickle. That's my husband, Michael, and our son over there." She turns her attention to Molly, and asks, "What did you want, Molly?"

"Can I play with your boy?"

Her mother says, "Molly! What are you doing?" To Leslie she says, "I apologize for Molly pushing herself on you... It's that we're new in town and she doesn't know too many kids."

"That's okay... Oh... Did you move into the Tucker's house on Watson street?"

"Why yes... we moved in yesterday."

"We're neighbors... we live two doors down from you to the west. I've been meaning to stop by and welcome you to the block."

"That's great... my name is Milley Stephens and..." A young man comes up to the table and Milley continues, "This is my husband, Frank. Frank, this is Leslie... was it Bricklin?"

"Brickle... Leslie Brickle... and this is Michael with our son, Jonathan." The two noticed the congregation around their table and came over. "Michael, these are the Stephens and they just moved into the Tucker's house up the street from us.

Michael says, "Good you meet you, Frank. Where do you work?"

"I start Monday... At the airplane factory...Concordia. "

"Hey... I work there too... I work in the electrical engineering shop. Say... Are you the software programmer that we heard was coming?"

"Well, I am a programmer... I guess I'm the one. We got transferred from the plant up north. We'd been wanting to move and... it just seemed that it all fell into place. We feel that... it was God's will that we come here."

Michael says, "It would appear that is the case... Do you guys have a church to go to tomorrow? How about coming with us? We go to that little chapel church over on California. I don't think you'll find one that will love you any better. We've got a great program for kids. It's Mother's day, you know. What do you say?"

As the grownups are talking, Molly moves beside Jonathan. She asks, "Do you want to play catch, Jonathan? I've got my glove."

"Wow! You bet, Molly... Let's go."

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my
mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the
depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
Psalm 139: 13-16 NIV

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A Father's Hope

Visit Forty-two - A Father's Day Story

What a beautiful day! It's not so much the brightness of God's glory or the intensity of the rainbow colors that are so predominate or even the sweet smells of baked bread, honeysuckle, and baby powder or the sounds of a bubbling stream of water or the call of a mourning dove in the distance that makes heaven so beautiful. It's the feeling of freedom in your soul and the richness of love in your heart that makes heaven special. Special isn't exactly the right word, complete is a more appropriate description.

Jesus said "it is finished" on the cross meaning he had completed his task, to make it possible for us to return to God, to be the perfect and only sacrifice necessary to allow us the way, though undeserved, to again walk in the garden with our creator, our friend.

"That looks like a pig's head over there... see?" Jesus is pointing at a cloud right over our heads. We are lying on our backs in clover on a hill watching the clouds pass overhead. Our heads are almost touching. Our feet are pointed in different directions, perpendicular to the slope of the hill.

I point skyward and say, "That one looks like a weigh-lifter guy... see the big arms. And there's a duck over there!"

Jesus rubs the beard on his chin and remarks, "That's not a duck... that looks more like Peter when he's upset." We laugh.

I roll over on my stomach and Jesus soon follows. We are laying head to head looking at the dirt beneath the grass and clover. I take a blade of grass and a pill bug crawls up the blade into my hand. It rolls up into a ball for protection. I place it down on the ground and it opens up and resumes it's journey.

Jesus says, "Why don't you go find Johnny and play some baseball? He's getting some friends together to play a game."

"Aren't you going to play?"

Jesus replies, "I've got to go to the Gate, but I'll meet you there in just a little while. I'll be the relief pitcher of something."

"Where do I find Johnny? You know how I am about directions."

"Start over the hill... have faith.. I'll send a guide. I'll see you soon."

I watch Jesus as he walks away from me down the hill. I feel a little part of me is leaving too. The Spirit is still with me, but there is still this feeling of separation. Like

when a friend or loved one goes away for a short time. You know it won't be long, but still... you are apart.

"Oh well," I sigh. "I better go find Johnny." I get to my feet and start up the hill through the clover and wildflowers. At the crest I look down the hill and in every direction, but I don't see Johnny or any baseball game. The valley is full of trees and I don't see a clearing that would be big enough for a baseball game to be played.

"Okay, Lord, what do I do? Where do I go?"

All of a sudden, I am attacked by a huge Monarch butterfly. It appears to be trying to land on my nose. I start waving my arms, frantically trying to save myself from this aggressor. The butterfly dodges my feeble antics and hovers a few feet away.

Then it comes to me. "Oh, you must be my guide. You were just getting my attention. Well, you succeeded. You didn't need to eat my nose though. Okay, lead on, mister butterfly."

We start down the hill and enter the trees at the base. We cross a wooden bridge over a stream that gently flows through this peaceful valley forest. There are deer, squirrels and rabbits in abundance in the forest, but they don't appear to be afraid of me. They continue foraging for food or playing chase among the trees with hardly a glance at this invader of their kingdom.

I continue to follow Mister Monarch as he flutters and flits in front of me. He doesn't get too far ahead as if he realizes my limitation in movement. We travel through the valley and emerge from the trees at the base of another hill. We start up the gentle slope and, finally, at the top on the level ground, I find Johnny and the others; there's maybe a dozen or more men and women playing catch, laughing and talking among themselves. I notice that the butterfly flies back down the hill and disappears in the trees. His job is completed.

"Hey! Want to play a game? We need another player." It's Johnny coming to meet me. Johnny is a pretty special guy. We're great friends now, but in the world we weren't. I treated Johnny pretty badly when we were kids. More than pretty badly... I treated him horribly. He has forgiven me, but I don't know if I could... if our positions were reversed. I guess I could... Jesus does that for his children... teaches them how to forgive.

"Yes... I want to play. What team am I on?"

Johnny replies, "You're on my team. Can you play outfield?"

I say yes and our team is in the field. Johnny's oldest son, Jon, is the captain of the other team at bat. There are seven players on each side; four infielders including the pitcher and three outfielders. The team at bat furnishes the catcher. Johnny says that

Jesus had just left for the Gate before I arrived and he would be back to play soon. He will probably pitch for both teams since there would be an uneven number of players. I don't mention that Jesus was with me also and had told me the same thing. It's hard to realize he can be everywhere with everyone.

There is a big pile of baseball gloves and I grab one to my liking and head out to right field. My nephew, Michael, is playing center field. Johnny is pitching and after a few practice throws, Jon comes up to bat. Jon is left handed and I move back a dozen steps or more thinking it would be better to run up for a fly ball so I should be deeper. The second pitch from Johnny is right over the plate. Jon swings and hits the ball with the fat part of the bat. I then realize that I'm not nearly back far enough. I turn and start running as hard as I can, looking over my shoulder from time to time to watch the flight of the ball.

The ball sails over my head, but, fortunately, it lands in some tall grass that stops it from rolling farther down the hill. Quickly, I grab the ball and throw to Michael who relays the ball back into the infield to hold Jon to a triple. From this experience, I know where to stand for the rest of the game in order to have a better chance of catching any ball hit in my direction.

We retire Jon's team after giving up only one run. At our turn at bat, we score two runs before they get us out. The lead switches back and forth between us. It's the seventh inning and we are taking a rest. The score is tied twelve to twelve.

Johnny and Jon are lying in the green grass with me. We each have a big icy glass of water. I'm eating a chocolate candy bar Michael has given me to replenish my energy... actually, I just like chocolate candy. You don't get tired in heaven.

Jon says to me, "If Frank had hit the ball that I hit over your head, you would still be chasing it."

"Who's Frank?" I ask as I notice the thoughtful expression in Johnny's eyes.

Johnny replies, "Frank is my youngest. I haven't thought of him in a while."

Jon laughs and then says, "Oh... right, dad. You pray for him every day.

Johnny smiles and replies, "I guess I do... I'm hopeful..."

"Has he not come to heaven yet?"

Jon replies, "No... and I don't believe he will. Dad does, but I don't."

"Why not?" I ask.

Johnny answers, "Frank didn't think the Christian way of life was for him. He thought we were foolish and he went his own way after he became an adult. I am hopeful that our teaching when he was younger will get through to him."

Jon says, "Dad, he is a thief and a murderer and in prison for life. He rejected every attempt you made to get through to him."

Johnny replies, "Well, I still hope and pray..."

There is a big commotion as several players start yelling, "Jesus is coming! Jesus is back!"

I feel God's presence too. His love floods into your soul like a tidal wave and joy overflows from your heart. Our view is blocked by players down the hill from where we are lying in the grass. We get to our feet and move so we can see better.

We see Jesus walking up the hill toward us. He has someone with him.

Johnny yells, "It's Frank! Frank has come back!"

Johnny, Jon and the rest of the team race down the hill to greet the new arrival. Johnny reaches him first and embraces his son. Jon arrives next and puts his arms around both of them.

Jesus continues his walk up the hill to stand with me. We watch the joyous reunion down from us. No words are really necessary, but I say, "This really is special, Lord."

Jesus replies, "Yes... A father's hope can make all the difference in where someone spends eternity."

After a moment, I say, "And you brought a player to make the sides even."

Jesus looks at me and we laugh. This is really a special... a complete day.

*But while he was a long way off,
his father saw him
and was filled with compassion for him;
he ran to his son,
threw his arms around him
and kissed him.
Luke 15: 20b*

Dedicated to Michael,

*a great friend, son, brother, husband and father.
He played the game to the fullest and
helped others reach the big league.
I'll be certain to choose him for my team.*

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Marcy's Treasure

Visit Forty-three

Marcy is straightening the chairs and picking up the discarded tracks and song sheets in the chapel. The service is over for the night and the congregation is in the dining room at the serving tables obtaining their nightly meal.

She has worked part time at 'Eternal Hope Mission' for about ten years; since her retirement from teaching at the university. For many, many years prior to retirement, she had felt a calling to work with the homeless and her services had been welcomed by Reverend Charles. The work at the mission and her church helped her get over the loss of her husband of forty-five years, Josh. He went to heaven about five years ago. Marcy still misses Josh. She touches her gray hair and for a moment is lost in the memories of a happy marriage.

Marcy resumes her tidying-up tasks and she places the trash in the wastebasket. As she straightens, she feels a sharp pain in her back, between her shoulder blades. It passes and she thinks, 'It sure is terrible to get old, everything hurts from time to time.'

"Marcy! Marcy!" It's Suzy, one of the many homeless women that frequent the mission. Suzy is in her late twenties and has been on the street since she was a teenager. Even though there is a wide difference in ages, they have become good friends; maybe more like mother and daughter. She hurries to Marcy, throws her arms around her and gives Marcy a big hug. She says, "I've got a job, Marcy! I went to that place you told me about and they got me a job. Not only that, they got me this apartment... I'll pay the rent from my paycheck."

"I'm proud of you, Suzy. See... I told you you could do this. Now, you work hard at this new job and save what money is left over after paying your rent and food. After you save up enough, go shopping and get you some new clothes. If you do good at this job, you'll get a chance at a better job. I've talked to some friends at the university about you. There is a program there to teach you about taking care of your money and things like that. Also, there are classes you can choose that will train you for other employment opportunities. It's only a couple nights a week and one on Saturday."

"But Marcy, I didn't finish high school... I can't go to no college."

"Sure you can... The program is just right for you. Here's some pamphlets for you to look over. Read them and we'll talk a little later. I've got to go clean up the tables and wash dishes. Get you something to eat, Suzy."

"Marcy! I almost forgot... I picked these for you." She hands a bouquet of wild flowers to Marcy. "They ain't much, but I know you like wild flowers."

"Oh, thank you, Suzy! They are beautiful... this is special. You thought enough to pick them for me. I'll put them in a vase with water. Thank you so much, Suzy. You brighten my day."

Marcy takes the flowers to the kitchen and finds a vase. She arranges the multicolored floral gift to her liking and runs some water into the vase. She places the vase in the window above the sink where she will be working. Tears come to her eyes and she quickly wipes them away. She and Josh spent a lot of time walking among the wild flowers in the fields near their home in the country. She sold the property after Josh died because there were too many memories there. Suddenly, she exclaims, "Oh, that hurts!" The pain in her back has returned, but more intense.

It's a bright day in heaven. God's love fills this dimension with more brilliance than noontime on a cloudless summer day. You can see the grass and trees growing and feel the peace and tranquillity of this glorious spot of creativity. God is walking through the garden and every creative aspect, even the blades of grass and leaves, are straining to be the very best of their creative nature. They know they will be acknowledged or noticed by their master artist and they seek his praise. The colors are sharper, the sounds more sweet and the smells more tantalizing than you can ever imagine or dream.

Josh is watching Jesus climb the hill to where Josh is standing on the porch of his home. As he arrives, their eyes meet and Josh always marvels at what he sees in those glorious eyes. Josh feels the love flow in and around his heart and joy bursts from his soul as their spirits unite and he is consumed by the grace of God. In an instant, he is transformed into a tiny fetus in God's hand and then into a newborn baby in his mother's arms and, finally, into a young man resting in the heart of his savior and friend.

For a moment they look into each other's eyes and then Josh says, "Jesus, I love you."

"And I you, my son."

They sit down in the porch swing and enjoy the beauty of the scene before them. Jesus asks, "Are we ready, Josh? Is this to your liking?"

Josh replies, "Everything is wonderful, Lord. But it's not complete."

"I know... but it soon will be. We need her here with us."

"But her work, Lord. She can do so much more. Shouldn't we wait?"

Jesus pauses a moment and then replies, "We've waited long enough. There are others being prepared... the work will go on. She's done enough and I want her home with me... with us."

They sit in silence for a while and then Jesus calls, "Knowlin!"

The death angel instantly stands by his master and says, "Yes, Lord."

"Bring my child to me."

It was a wonderful funeral. All of Marcy's family and friends attended and cried and showed their love for a beautiful lady. Everyone she worked with at the mission came, even a few of the young women Marcy was helping in their struggle to make something better of their lives.

After the graveside services, Reverend Charles notices Suzy is still sitting and looking at the coffin with tears streaming down her face. He goes over and sits down beside her. He places his arm around her shoulders to console the bereaving, young woman.

"It's all right, Suzy. Marcy's with God now and, although we will miss her very, very much, she is in a wonderful place."

"I know, Pastor, but what will we do without her. She helped so many and I don't know if I can go on without her to guide me."

"I know she wanted you to go to college. She wanted you to work hard and if you do that, everything will take care of itself."

"But I can't afford to go to no college. I barely can get by like it is."

"Marcy took care of that, Suzy."

"What do you mean?"

"Marcy sold her home and property. She and her husband had no children so she placed the money in a trust fund to be used by the mission however we felt best. We are going to use the money to pay for your college and for any others that need the assistance. I know Marcy would want the money to be used in this way."

"Oh, thank you, Reverend. I'm going to do what Marcy wanted me to do, but when I finish that old college study stuff, I'm coming back here to work."

Reverend Charles says, "I believe Marcy would like that also."

Josh and Jesus are still sitting in the porch swing. It doesn't feel like Knowlin has been gone very long. They see the large angel walking up the hill toward them. He has a young lady with him under the protection of his wings.

Josh leaps to his feet and starts waving his arms and shouting, "Marcy! Marcy!"

Marcy spots Josh and starts running up the hill. She runs up the porch steps into the arms of her Josh. They embrace and kiss for a very long time. After a while, they end their embrace and Marcy turns to Jesus. Immediately, there is recognition and she is drawn into God's heart where peace and love fill her soul to overflowing.

Jesus says, "I've missed you, my daughter. I'm so happy to have you home."

"Oh, Jesus, I'm happy also. It's so beautiful and peaceful here. This is exactly like our home in the world and the wildflower fields are perfect."

"I see you have brought your own bouquet with you."

"They are a gift."

"Just like you, my child. You are a good and faithful servant. Well done. Enter into your reward."

"Oh, Jesus!" Marcy exclaims. "The flowers... the centers have turned... into precious jewels... And, it's starting to rain."

The gentle spring raindrops fall from a cloudless sky. Jesus says, "It's not rain, Marcy. Those are the teardrops of love that were shed at your funeral by all who know you. Reach out your hand."

Marcy reaches out beyond the protection of the porch overhang to catch the drops of rain in her hand. The drops aren't rain but sparkling diamonds. She exclaims, "Oh my goodness! They are so beautiful."

Jesus says, "You have so much wealth stored here, Marcy. You are a very wealthy person.

"But Jesus," Marcy says. "I don't deserve this... these treasures belong to you."

"No Marcy... you are the real treasure... You are my wealth... you and Josh."

*And God raised us up with Christ
and seated us with him
in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,
in order that in the coming ages
he might show the incomparable
riches of his grace, expressed in his
kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 2: 6, 7*

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Wings of Mercy

Visit Forty-four

It is an early summer morning and Bill opens the screen door to walk out onto his front porch. He goes to the swing at one end of the porch and takes a seat to drink his coffee and enjoy the view. He loves the early morning. The birds are singing a greeting song to the sun and the gentle breezes from the east are cool and refreshing. It will be hot later in the day, but it is pleasant now.

He prays, 'Lord, thank you for all you are and all you do for us. Your great love is overwhelming and so undeserved. Lord, thank you for this beautiful day and all your creatures. They make this world a wonderful place'. Bill takes a sip of coffee as he watches a feisty squirrel in a nearby tree. He continues, 'Lord, I have one request. Please look after that scamp of a grandson, Charlie. I know he tries your patience, Lord, as he does mine, but he's a good boy. I know he's one of yours so I guess it's up to you.... If you could send one of your angels to watch over him, I know he would be safe...'

The Holy Spirit is moving through the corridor between here and there as he gathers prayers to present to God. The area next to Bill is filled with the sweet fragrance of faith and love. He hears the words, *"If you could send one of your angels to watch over him, I know he would be safe..."*

The Comforter looks at Bill's Guardian, Blasdon, and, without a word, the mighty angel departs.

In another city not too far away, Charlie is up early also. He and his best friend, Blake, have climbed the rope ladder to Charlie's tree house in the Oak tree in his back yard. Charlie's dad has cut out a large sheet of wood to fit the tree limbs. He and Charlie's granddad worked together to complete most of the 'house'. Charlie and Blake have added walls and pillows to make the 'house' comfortable. The 'house' is about ten feet above the ground and they have a good view of the neighborhood. No one can sneak up on their location.

The two friends are having a little argument. Blake says, "It is too mine, Charlie. Mom wants it and I'll take it home and be right back."

"No, it's not yours. This towel is mine." Charlie is holding the towel by one corner.

Blake replies, "No... You have one just like it, but I brought that one from home a week ago. Mom wants to wash it today. I'll bring it back when it's dry."

Blake grabs the other end of the towel and tries to pull it away from Charlie. "Let me have it, Charlie. I'm not fooling." His laugh belies his words.

Charlie pulls back and yells, "I'm not either, Blake... Let go of my towel." They are both laughing as they try to wrestle the towel away from each other.

As Charlie pulls the towel very hard, it slips from Blake's hands. Charlie staggers backward and falls headfirst out the door of the tree house.

Blake yells, "Charlie!" He scrambles to the edge, afraid for his friend.

Not far away, in that timeless dimension of eternity's heaven; where man's corruption and pollution are banned, we find truth and beauty. The foolish lies concocted by Satan for man to justify his sins of murder, adultery, sexual perversion, and self-service are reserved for the fires of hell. Those lies will be played over and over for the rock-hard souls of hell's inhabitants to make the torturous seconds of eternal punishment more severe and unbearable.

Here in the beauty of heaven's purity and God's love, his children enjoy the peace and tranquility of a perfect place. An existence that was intended from the beginning of time, but was forsaken by man's disobedient nature. Man discarded and shattered the fragile bond between he and his Creator and it was only due to God's great love named Jesus that the pieces could be assembled again to reopen the gates of Eden and allow the communion to resume for eternity.

We leave the beautiful hills and valleys of heaven's gardens to travel to a large house on the outskirts of the Holy City. The house belongs to a wood craftsman by the name of Berry. It is a beautiful house of the finest wood, created with the loving hands of the savior. A coating of white gold makes the house gleam in the light of God's grace. The interior is furnished with gifts of gold, silver and diamonds; treasures accumulated from the work and service of a faithful servant of God.

There is the sound of activity coming from the workshop at the back of the house. We find Berry feverishly sanding a beautiful mahogany end table. This master craftsman has been working on this table for over three of our worldly weeks, but in reality, to Berry, it has only been a few hours. This is to be a gift for Berry's new neighbors and he is almost finished.

Berry has been in heaven a short time, even from our dimension's perspective. He appears to be a man of about twenty-five of our years. In fact, that is the age in which he accepted Jesus that revival night years ago. Berry died to our world of a heart attack

when he was only sixty-five of our years. He and his wife, Samantha, have been joined again in Eden to live together forever.

Berry feels Jesus' presence long before he spots the beautiful red hummingbird among the Rose of Sharon flowers next to the workshop. In an instant, Berry is transformed into a pure-white hummingbird. His soul is drawn to the heart of his savior as they soar to the throne of the Father to drink of the sweet nectar of God's love and mercy. Berry's heart is overflowing with joy and peace as laughter bubbles from his mouth like a freshly-poured carbonated drink in a glass.

In an instant, he and the Holy Spirit are standing in the corridor between heaven and earth. Blasdon, the Guardian, is with them. They are looking at two young boys in a tree house. The boys are pulling what looks like a towel between them and they are laughing.

The Spirit says, "Berry, I need your assistance to help Blasdon do his appointed task. Will you help us?"

"You know I will, Lord. What do you need of me?"

The Spirit replies, "Something very little, but it will mean so much." He speaks to his angel, "Blasdon, protect Berry on his journey."

Blake yells, "Charlie!" He scrambles to the edge, afraid for his friend.

Blake looks over the edge, expecting to see Charlie lying on the ground. He finds his friend hanging upside down by his left leg. When he fell, Charlie's left pant leg snagged on the hook used to attach the rope ladder. Blake laughs as he sees his friend is not hurt.

Charlie is not laughing. He yells, "Quit your laughing and get me down from here, Blake. Whatever my pant leg is caught on won't hold me forever. Help me!"

"I can't reach your hand, Charlie. And you're hanging where I can't get down the ladder to hold you up."

"Let me help."

The two boys are startled as a young man appears beside Charlie. "I'll hold Charlie up and, Blake, you unsnag his leg so he can get his foot onto the ladder and pull himself up."

Bill is still drinking his coffee and watching the hummingbirds around the special feeder hanging on a support next to the porch. Monica, his wife, comes outside with the phone.

She says, "William's on the phone. Charlie fell out of that tree house, but he's okay. His leg caught on a hook or something. Some man, who was passing by in the alley, heard the boys yelling and came to help."

Bill takes the phone and says, "Hey, William, what's this about Charlie... I see... Yes, God was looking out for him.. that's for sure. Hooks? Oh yes... we talked about that... You wanted the eye-hooks to hold the ladder and Berry wanted the open hooks... No... I put in the eye-hooks like you wanted. You're kidding...I never noticed before. You don't suppose Berry came back later and replaced them... That was a couple of weeks before his heart attack. He must have... Well, whatever... No, William.. I didn't change them, but it looks like those open end hooks saved Charlie a bad fall... Yes... we'll be over later for supper. Thanks for the call, son... I love you too. Remember to thank God for his mercy... bye."

He hands the phone to Monica. He says, "That's really strange... You remember us talking about what hooks to use to hold the tree-house rope-ladder?"

"Yes... I remember you and Berry having a debate right in our living room. He felt very strongly that you should use the ones he wanted... I don't remember what they were called."

"Well, according to William, they are the ones holding the ladder and also the ones that saved Charlie from getting hurt. Berry must have slipped back some time and changed them out. That's the only explanation. William believes he checked the ladder a couple of months ago and the eye-hooks were there. He must have not looked carefully or just took it for granted that the right hooks were there.

"It has to be... Berry's been gone for over a year."

"You know... it's just like God to use someone to work his mercy long before it's needed. God must have used Berry way back then to help us out today."

Bill takes another sip of coffee and continues, "It reminds me of what Berry said a number of times about hummingbird wings... He said that like the mercy of God, the hummingbird's wings can't be seen, but they're there all the same."

Monica says, "I miss Berry and Samantha."

"Me too... But we'll see them soon... I hope God will let Berry know that we're thinking of him and to thank him for his help today."

In the corridor, the Holy Spirit looks at Blasdon.

Blasdon says, "I'll go tell him."

*How priceless is your unfailing love!
Both high and low among men
find refuge in the shadow
of your wings.
Psalm 36:7*

*Heavenly Visits : www.heavenlyvisits.com
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The Decoration

Visit Forty-five - A Christmas Story

"Grandma, are you putting up the tree again this year?"

"Of course... Carol. I put it up every year. It wouldn't seem like Christmas without the tree."

Good... I agree. Even though you're coming over Christmas day to be with us and watch your great-grandsons open their presents, I'm glad you want to have your tree also. I'll help you. Why not now? We can get it down from the attic and do as much as we can before we go shopping."

"Oh, that would be so helpful, Carol. I've been dreading the chore of getting it down out of storage. I love the decorating, just not the setting up part."

A couple of hours later, Corrine and her granddaughter look at a brightly-lit, ornament-laden Christmas tree. Corrine remarks, "That is a beautiful tree... if I do say so myself... Thank you, dear, for helping me. I couldn't have done it by myself."

"I enjoyed it too, Grandma. It reminded me of old times. Say! You ready to do some serious shopping? We can get the boy's gifts and probably Aunt June's this trip. That should about finish up your Christmas gift buying."

"It's about time... I've about reached my budget on gift buying." Corrine looks at the tree and says, "Wait a minute... Where's the Christmas Angel?"

"What Christmas angel? ... You don't mean the old ornament you threw away years ago?"

"Threw it away? How could I have done that? Your granddad gave that ornament to me when we were kids... Surely, Carol, I didn't do that... did I?"

"We talked about it, Grandma, and you said we should get another ornament for the top. I think you threw it away... Do you remember if you did or... maybe you just stored it someplace?"

"Oh, I don't remember... It's bad when you get so old that you can't remember important stuff like that."

"You'll remember, Grandma... Don't worry about it. Come on... Let's hit the shopping trail... Those stores are calling your name... Can you hear them?"

There is a faint fog or mist that clings to the ground, that flows and boils and yet is still and transparent. In the distance through this mist, we can see a young boy and a girl playing beneath a large oak tree. They appear to be about twelve years of age. The girl is wearing a yellow dress and she has a matching color ribbon in her hair. The boy has on overalls and a beige shirt. The girl is sitting in a tire swing and the boy is pushing her. They are laughing and having a wonderful time; they enjoy being together.

Corrine laughs and then exclaims, "Max! Stop it! Max, don't push so hard. You're going to sling me out of this tire. Stop it, Max Foster!"

"Cry baby, Cry baby. Corrine's a cry baby."

"Am not, Frog-face. Max Frog-face Foster. That sounds right to me."

"Oh, so that sound right to you, does it... Well, let's see how high this old swing will go."

"Max.x.x.x!... Don't you dare! I'll tell your mother. Cut it out!"

"Take it back then or I'll..."

"I take it back... You're not a frog-face..."

"That's better... Now I'll slow you down..."

Max grabs the swing and the tire slows down and as it almost stops, Corrine jumps off. She yells as she runs toward a picnic table, "You're a freak-face... Max Freak-face Foster... That's it. That's your name."

Max runs after her and yells, "Well, if I'm a Freak-face Foster, you're Corrine Freak-face Foster... so there!"

"Corrine yells back over her shoulder, "Am not, Freak-face... Am not! We're not married yet. Am not, Freaky!"

Max yells, "Are too...too... too... *the ornament's in the gray box in the garage.*"

Corrine is instantly awake and she sits up in bed. She says, "Oh, it's just a dream... Me and Max years ago... What did he say? Something about the ornament... I wish I could remember... Oh God, I miss my Max." Corrine wipes away the tears that cascade down her cheeks. She prays, "Lord God, take care of Max until I come home. Tell him I love and miss him." She lays down again and has a hard time getting back to sleep.

The young boy is working on a wooden ornament; it is very intricate, covered with fine carvings on the face. It is a picture of the manger with Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus. He holds it up to the sunlight flooding through the window. Satisfied he grabs a small paint brush and begins to stain the pale wood to a dark brown color.

He is startled as a huge angel enters the door. The angel says, "What are you doing, Max? It is not allowed. It is dangerous for you to go alone."

"It's okay, Blasdon... Jesus said I could and I didn't want to bother you. He knows I miss Corrine so very much."

"I know, my friend, but she will be here soon... sooner than you think, time doesn't mean the same in this dimension. You have to be patient."

Max puts down his work of art and replies, "I know, but she needs me, Blasdon... I don't want her to be unhappy. Besides, it's just a dream. She doesn't remember too much about it."

"Well, Jesus told me to help you. It's the night before the special day called Christmas in the world. Corrine is asleep again. Hold my hand and we'll go for a visit."

Corrine and Max are sitting at a picnic table. Corrine opens her lunch sack and pulls out two sandwiches. She says, "Mother and me made two sandwiches. This one is for you, Max. But I didn't bring one for your big friend dressed in white over there."

"He's not hungry, Corrine. Here I have this present for you. I made it in Sunday School today." Max opens a paper sack and takes out the Christmas Angel. He hands it to Corrine.

"Oh, Max!" Corrine exclaims. "An angel! It's beautiful. How did you do it?"

"Mrs. Penny helped me... I told her what I wanted and she got the stuff for me to make it. Do you like it?"

"I love it, Max! I'll keep it forever and ever."

"It's in the gray box in the garage."

Corrine sits straight up in bed. She thinks, "A dream... Max and me at a picnic like we use to do years ago... It was the time he gave me my angel ornament. What was said? Something about the garage. What time is it? Oh, it's six o'clock... and it's Christmas... I guess I might as well get up... I'm too awake to go back to sleep. Anyway, Carol will be here in a couple of hours to take me to her house."

Corrine fixes a pot of coffee and she pours herself a cup. She goes to the back door, opens it and walks out into the garage. She thinks, "What was it about this garage?"

She walks over to the neatly stacked storage boxes. She thinks again, "I might have stored that ornament away... which box... Well, look at that... the neighbor's cat must have gotten in here again and was prowling about. That old gray box is sticking halfway out of the stack... There's something about a gray box in my dream. Well, I might as well take a look-see."

The gray box isn't very heavy and Corrine pulls it down from the shelf. She opens the box and pushes some old drapes and table cloths out of the way. She exclaims out loud, "I remember now! Here's that old shoe box!"

It's eight o'clock and right on time Corrine hears Carol's knock at the front door. She opens the door and they both yell, "Christmas Gift!" at the same time. They both laugh and then Carol asks, "When did that old Christmas tradition start, Grandma?"

"Oh, we've always done it in our family for as long as I can remember. Whenever we meet anyone on Christmas Eve, we'd greet them with "Christmas Eve Gift" and then on Christmas we'd say "Christmas Gift... just an old custom."

"Grandma! You found it! You found the Christmas angel. The tree looks perfect now with that ornament sitting on top in its proper place. How did you find it?"

"You won't believe it, but your grandfather reminded me of where I put it."

Jesus is walking from individual to individual inspecting each ornament that will adorn the tall evergreen tree at the heart of the celebration. He comes to Max and Max holds up the wood-stained and finely carved manger scene. Jesus says, "A fine work as usual, Max, my son. Not as fine as you are, but very nice indeed. Things work out well don't they?"

"Yes, Jesus, with your help... Happy Birthday, Jesus!"

"Merry Christmas, my son."

Marlina's Homecoming

Visit Forty-six

The red balloon is the prettiest thing Marlina has ever seen. Her mother bought it for her at the toy store in the mall. It has a long string tied to it and she pulls the balloon down to her and then lets it go to watch the balloon soar and try to escape. The end of the string is tied in a bow knot to her wrist so there is no escape for the pretty balloon.

Marlina is walking with her mother and two brothers as they leave the mall area and try to find their parked car. Luis, her baby brother, sitting in his stroller, would love to get his hands on Marlina's balloon.

Danny, her older brother, says, "Let's have our balloons fight, Marlina". Danny, who is six years old starts hitting his blue balloon against Marlina's. "Pow! Bang! Got you".

"Stop it, Danny!" Marlina tries to protect her balloon from her brother's attack. "Mommy, make Danny stop hitting my balloon!"

"Danny, quit picking on your sister. Now be careful... where is our car?" They have left the mall and are trying to find their parked car. "My hands are full and this stroller is not rolling good... you kids hold hands and watch out for cars. I believe I see our car over there."

"Marlina, don't untie your balloon. You'll lose it." Danny tries to grab his sister's arm, but she pulls away.

"You don't have yours tied... I'm as big as you, Danny." Marlina backs away from her brother and into the parking isle.

"Marlina! Watch out for..."

There is a screech of brakes. The motorist doesn't have time to stop as Marlina appears in front of her car. No longer is the red balloon restrained by this world. It rises rapidly into the sky. It has escaped.

In the dimension that pays no notice to time; a dimension that we call heaven or eternity or home, Mack is just opening his toy store. Mack has spent considerable effort in stocking his store with all the toys from our world that will make the young souls happier in their new surroundings. Children are allowed to be children in heaven. As they mature, they will experience new and exciting adventures, but for now they can enjoy just being a child.

As Mack is straightening up his counter, he is started by a young whirlwind called Philip who blows in the front door. Philip appears to be about six of our years and he's been in heaven only a short time. "Philip, where are you going in such a rush... Slow down, boy."

Philip replies breathlessly, "Haven't you heard, Mister Mack? Marlina is coming today. Jesus just told me. I'm going to the Gate to meet her. I don't know what to get for her homecoming. What should I get her, Mister Mack?"

"She'll like this, Philip, I'm certain." Mack hands Philip a string that is holding a big red balloon. "She lost hers."

"That's great, Mister Mack... Are you coming?"

"I'll be right there. Now get out of here, boy."

The light is very bright to Marlina's eyes. Finally, they adjust to the brightness and a warm glow fills her soul. She is walking slowly down a wide path as she surveys this wonderful place. The colors of the flowers and grass alongside the path are so vivid and beautiful. The distant mountains are so tall, the sky so clear and the air so fresh and clean.

The sweet smells of honey and lilac fill the air and butterflies of all varieties are everywhere. Marlina holds up her hand and a butterfly with blue and black markings on its wings lands on her finger. Her laughter, from the purest of hearts, rings throughout heaven's garden. She feels God's smile in her heart and his kiss on her lips.

Marlina is not alone. She looks up at the big angel and asks, "Are you Jesus?"

Blasdon, the guardian, laughs. He knells down beside her and replies, "No, little one. I am his servant. I am your servant also."

"I remember... you were with me in the hospital. You held my hand. I wasn't scared."

"No... you were very, very brave. I am proud of you."

"Where are we going, Blasdon?"

"There's a big celebration... a party... for your homecoming. Everyone is anxious to see you. I think you'll like it."

Marlina extends her hand and says, "Well, let's go, Blasdon... I do like parties."

Blasdon stands up and takes her hand. He says, "Here we go, Marlina. This is the first day of your eternity."

As they walk down the garden path, they laugh and talk. Marlina asks Blasdon many, many questions. She makes him laugh because she is so thrilled and excited about the birds and animals and everything she sees as they travel.

They reach the top of a small hill and see a large group of people in the valley below. The group is having a great time singing and dancing. Marlina looks up at Blasdon.

He says, "Yes, Marlina... This is the party in your honor."

Marlina looks down at the crowd of people. It is such a large group... she feels a little afraid. At that moment, she spots a man who stands out from the crowd surrounding him. There

is something special about him... all she sees is him. She knows at once who he is and her fear subsides. She looks up at Blasdon and says, "I've got to go, Blasdon."

"I know, little one... your Savior awaits. I'll see you soon."

"Aren't you coming to my party?"

"Yes... I'll be there... For now... you must meet your destiny."

She smiles and then turns and races down the hill toward the one who has loved her long before she was and will love her as she is...forever. Even though we feel 'time' is suspended in heaven, it actually becomes more real, of more value, when mixed with the Creator of all time. Time is no longer a punishment, a burden, a thief, or an enemy. Time becomes our friend, because it's ours... 'forever'.

Marlina runs into the Love of God and he scoops her up in his arms to hold her close to his heart. Joy and peace fill her soul to overflowing... tears of full happiness flow from her eyes as her savior kisses her salty-tasting cheeks. Their spirits mingle; the Creator and Image are one, finally and forever.

"I love you, Jesus."

"And I love you, my child. Everything I have belongs to you now. You make me very happy."

Jesus feels a tug on his robe. He looks down at Philip. Jesus then says to Marlina, "There's someone here to see you, Chosen-one. He's been looking forward to you coming almost as much as I have."

When Jesus places her on the ground, she exclaims, "Philip!!! Where have you been? I looked and asked when you didn't come out and play. They said you'd gone away. I cried and cried. I just knew that you had gone to heaven."

Philip replies, "I'm sorry, Marlina... I did come here and I've been waiting for you ever since. I thought it would be a long time, but it wasn't. See...I got you this... a present."

"Oh, a red balloon... my favorite. Look! It doesn't fly away when I let the string go!"

"It doesn't have to... like you, Marlina, it's home. Come on, let's go look around. I want to show you the greatest stuff. You're going to love it here, Marlina."

Marlina looks up at Jesus. He says, "Go, little one... Go with Philip and see that 'greatest stuff'. Remember I'm always with you and we have eternity to love and share. Be sure to get some homecoming cake and punch. Everyone is waiting to greet and welcome you. Go with my love."

Jesus watches his two children as they join the other Eternals for the celebration. He looks up the hill and sees the tears in Blasdon's eyes. Although they are a long distant apart, their spirits unite.

In his heart, Jesus hears Blasdon say, "Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to bring her home."

Jesus replies, "Thank you for your loyal service to Marlina and myself."

"I should have done more."

"You did all you were required to do... it was her decision. It was intended that these two should be together... and they are."

Blasdon replies, "She is very happy. Isn't she, Lord?"

"She is and so is Philip and, I have to admit... so am I."

"Thank you, Jesus. I am also."

*How great is the love the Father has
lavished on us, that we should be
called children of God! And that
is what we are! The reason the
world does not know us is that
it did not know him.*

*Dear Friends, now we are children
of God, and what we will be has not
yet been made known. But we know
when he appears, we shall be like him,
for we shall see him as he is.
1 John 3: 1, 2 NIV*

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Gift from the Heart

Visit Forty-seven

The battle is still raging within Chad's soul. He is a tired warrior, but he keeps on keeping on. Even though his heart is heavy and weary, he continues on his journey of faith and still resists Satan's attempts to defeat him.

It is a bright summer evening and Chad is traveling down the interstate to meet Julie, his wife, at her mother's house. The heavy traffic keeps him alert, but adds to his stress and worry. He tunes the radio to a Christian station and hears the familiar words, 'blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. O what a foretaste of glory divine'.

He prays aloud, "Lord God, you are the king of creation. You are the very breath I breathe, the food I eat and the love in my heart. You sought me when I was a sinner and you bought my soul with the precious blood of Jesus. Forgive me, Lord, for my weaknesses. Help me to seek your guidance and counsel and strength..."

His thoughts are interrupted as a red mustang cuts into his lane. "Idiot!!!" He thinks a moment and then says, "Lord, help me to forgive the idiots of this world..." Chad reduces his speed and allows proper spacing between vehicles for this intruder.

"Lord, haven't I done all that's possible for any man? I've shouldered most of the blame; gone to counseling; bought flowers and presents. Is it really over; ten years gone, poof? How can this be your will? What have I done wrong? What am I missing?"

He glances over to the floorboard on the passenger side of the car. The glass vase containing twelve beautiful red roses is wedged up against the seat by the old blanket Chad carries in the trunk. The vase still wobbles with the movement of the car. Chad thinks, 'I hope these will do some good. I don't want to lose Julie. Mom always said that roses saved their marriage many times. I hope it works for us.'

Not far away, in the corridor between there and here, a tremendous battle is raging. The forces of evil represented by Humdar, the demon, is fighting Trinance, God's mighty warrior angel. Swords are slashing and clanging as they strike against each other. The two combatants weave and bob as they circle each other, trying to find that little opening where their blade might penetrate the other's defenses.

Trinance feels added strength from Chad's prayer. His sword strikes with more force and his movements are more swift than before.

Across town at the house to where Chad is traveling, Julie and her mother, Jessica, are having a discussion. Jessica says, "I think you have to give your marriage all the chances necessary. All of us go through difficult times... Heaven knows your father and I have had our

share of bumpy times. I certainly wasn't going to give up what we have together. You and Chad have a good marriage... a great marriage."

"Mom, I know we do... It was just... I didn't think Chad loved me anymore. He was always working so hard and it seemed he didn't have a place for me in his heart."

"We all get that... 'not appreciated, taken for granted' feeling... from time to time. He's been paying a lot of attention lately."

Julie laughs and then replies, "Yes, he has... Chad's been very, very sweet... like his old self... when we first got married."

"See... he still loves you and wants to keep you and... you love him."

"I know, Mom... And I feel this decision is what God wants me to do. That's what I'm going to tell Chad when he gets here... I love him and we're going home."

"Good... I can have my spare bedroom back." They both laugh.

Not too far away, in a dimension of perfection, of beauty, love and peace, a young woman is working in her garden. Rebecca appears to be about twenty years old, when in reality she left the world when she was forty-five of our years. The effects of the cancers of our world were left in her grave and Jesus provided this perfect container for her spirit. She has no more pain and no more grief; only joy and fulfillment embrace her heart.

She examines and admires the beautiful assortment of flowers. She is especially proud of the rose beds filled to overflowing with vivid colors of red, orange, yellow and white.

Her heart beats faster as she hears her savior say, "Well done, my Rebecca. The garden is beautiful."

She turns to see Jesus walking toward her through the mums and lilies. She says, "Thank you, Jesus. I do enjoy taking care of this beautiful garden you gave me."

"I knew you would and you have done a great work here." Jesus comes closer and continues, "I need to ask a favor. I need your help again, my child."

Rebecca is excited, "How can I help, Lord?"

"I would like for you to go on another 'visit' for me. One of our children is in need. You know my servant, Blasdon, don't you?" Jesus continues after Rebecca nods her head, "Well, Blasdon requires assistance that only you can give. Will you help?"

"Oh, yes, Jesus. I would love to help."

Jesus calls, "Blasdon! Rebecca is ready. Hurry now."

Trinance jabs his blade to the right, blocks the blade of Humdar and thrusts his sword of mercy into the chest of the fallen angel. Humdar drops to his knees and slowly dissolves into a green mist. He has ceased to exist.

Trinance looks to the throne of the one true God. The creator of all is smiling.

Chad is continuing down the freeway in the leftmost lane at the posted speed of seventy miles an hour. He is concentrating on the traffic ahead and he doesn't see the car behind him. Suddenly it darts around Chad to change lanes and, in the process, it clips Chad's bumper.

Chad's heart skips a beat or two as he feels his car swerve to the left as he loses control. He yells, "Lord, help me!"

His car slams into the concrete divider between the two opposing streams of traffic. Chad's head hits the driver door window and he loses consciousness as his car careens back into the flow of traffic. He barely misses the car that caused the accident as his car spins across three lanes of traffic.

Witnesses are amazed that Chad's car doesn't hit another vehicle as it crosses the lanes and winds up on the right shoulder of the highway banging up against a guard rail. Of course, they are unable to see the many guardians working together to keep the following cars from hitting Chad's.

A huge sixteen wheel tractor-trailer rig's brakes lock and it swerves toward Chad's silent vehicle. Blasdon's mighty hands push the rig back onto the highway and it narrowly misses hitting Chad.

Chad tries to clear his head. It is throbbing and his left shoulder aches more than the other bones in his body. He looks to his right, out the passenger side window to see a familiar face through his foggy vision. "Mom! What are you doing here? Am I going to die? Am I dead... and you're here to take me to heaven?"

Rebecca replies, "No, Chad... I'm here for the flowers. It's not your time."

They are interrupted by the truck driver, "Hey, buddy... Don't move... the ambulance guys will be here in just a little while... I called them. Do you hurt anywhere? Man, your car's a mess. I don't know how I missed you... My truck just moved over."

Chad looks back to the passenger window, but his mother is gone. He passes out again.

Julie and her mother have hurried to the hospital. They received the call shortly after Chad was admitted to emergency. They wait anxiously in the emergency waiting room for the medical personnel to finish examining Chad.

Finally, the doctor motions for them to come. They join him and together walk hurriedly down the hospital hall toward Chad's room. Julie asks, "How is he, doctor?"

"He's doing just fine... Oh, he sustained a minor concussion and he will have a headache for a few days. There will also be other aches and pains from being bounced around against his seat belt and door, but there aren't any broken bones or internal injuries that we can see. We'll keep him overnight and make certain nothing shows up. He's very lucky from what I've been told."

Julie nods and replies, "God was protecting him."

They arrive at Chad's hospital room and Julie rushes inside. She is relieved to see Chad sitting up in bed and the tears come.

Chad says, "Don't cry, Babe. There's nothing wrong with me but bumps and little stuff."

"I know, silly... That's why I'm crying... because you're okay." She kisses her husband and then says, "I'm sorry for putting you through what you've been through... I just needed to sort things out a little. I love you and I want us to be together."

"Wow! You don't know how much I wanted to hear you say that... I'm ready to go home now." Chad starts to get out of bed.

Julie laughs and then says, "Wait, Chad... you've got to stay here tonight. They want to make certain you're okay."

"I'm better than okay... With news like that I'm on top of the world."

"Excuse me." They are interrupted by a nurse at the door. "The ambulance guys left these at the nurse's station for you." She places a glass vase with twelve beautiful red roses on Chad's table.

Chad recognizes the arrangement. He says, "Those are the flowers that I was bringing to you, Julie. How did they survive the crash? You know, I had a dream about Mom while I was knocked out. She was holding the vase... She said something, but I can't remember what it was."

The nurse replies, "The emergency guy said that a lady at the scene of the accident gave the flowers to them after they had loaded you into the ambulance. She said she found them in the car and didn't want to see them get lost. The guy thinks she said they are a 'gift from the heart'."

Julie says, "With how you were protected from harm, Chad, I think that is a 'gift from **God's** heart'. I thank him very much for that gift."

*For it is by grace you have been saved,
through faith -- and this is not from yourselves,
it is the gift of God --
not by works, so that no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:8 NIV*

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Let's Go, Mister

Visit Forty-eight

Tobias J. Johnson; Toby to his friends, loves this particular time of the day. Along about four in the afternoon, after the day's chores have been done, Toby swings into Mister's saddle. Toby waves to two of his sons, Kelly and Mark, and they know their father is headed to the high country. Toby's four sons take care of most of the ranch operations now. Kitty, his only daughter, takes care of the house and the books. Toby does more supervising than working now since he is getting close to sixty years of age.

He purchased this land during and after returning from that place called Viet Nam in the latter sixties. This remote-location acreage was selling pretty cheap then and Toby used his Army pay to buy up over a thousand acres for cattle raising; the reason for his college education. He had been raised nearby and knew every inch of it from his childhood. He also helped two of his sons, Paul and John, purchase adjoining acreage when they got married. Toby has two grandsons and two granddaughters.

Mister slowly ambles down the familiar trail, beside mowed fields with rolls of hay lining the fences waiting to be used during the coming winter. The trail will take them down to the little-used 'Farm to Market' road that runs beside Toby's ranch. They will cross the two-lane road close to the bridge that spans the river. From there it is only a short gallop into the hills for a beautiful view of the setting sun and a talk with the Lord and to Katrita.

Katrita or "Kat" as Toby called her, was the love of his life. The young Indian girl, who was ten years Toby's junior, caught his eye the first time he saw her. They met at the church down the road when she and her foster parents joined the congregation after moving to town. Kat's father owned the store in town.

After a proper introduction and courtship, they were married at the little church and settled down to grow a ranch and a family. They were successful at both endeavors. Not only did Toby find a good partner in marriage, but he found someone that taught him about God and a living relationship with the Lord. Toby had gone to church all his life, but Kat showed him that he needed Jesus in his life on a personal basis. His life took on new meaning from that day forward.

This didn't mean that they didn't have problems just because they were Christians; far from it. They lost their first child due to miscarriage and they nearly lost the ranch on two occasions; one time when the complete herd was almost lost due to a snowstorm and the other when prices of beef fell so low that you could just about give the cows away. And then, Kat died. That was about five years ago. She was so young, only forty-five, but she just got sick and died. This left a big hole in Toby's heart.

"It's getting colder, Mister," Toby says as he rubs his graying beard. "That norther is blowing in now. It'll be down to freezing soon." Toby pulls the collar of his jacket close to his neck. "I know you miss Kat almost more'an me, Mister, since you was her horse. That's why you and me go up to the high ground together... to the place where we buried her... she loved that place more than any spot on the ranch. Let's go, Mister!"

Toby urges the big horse to a gallop as they head down to the road a short distance away. He sees the big eighteen-wheeler coming down the road. It is unusual for the big rigs to come this way. Toby assumes the driver missed the entrance to the interstate and he is going to cut through to the next entrance.

Not too far away, in the dimension of hope, love and peace, a young Indian girl is sitting beside a bubbling stream with trout leaping out of the water. Kat is working on an oil painting of the scene before her. She is about finished and she stops to examine her work. She concludes that the painting is complete and almost as beautiful as the real scene.

She feels the presence of her savior and she turns toward the light of lights. Her soul leaps within her breast as the glory of God draws her spirit into his loving heart. She exclaims, "My Lord!"

Jesus replies, "My child!" He brushes away the tears of joy and he holds his adopted daughter close to his chest. After a moment he says, "Your painting is very beautiful."

Kat replies, "Not as beautiful as your original creation. Thank you for allowing me to attempt to capture a small portion of heaven."

"It makes me happy that you are happy, my child." Jesus looks at an incomplete canvass. He remarks, "I see you haven't yet finished this picture of the mesa."

Kat replies, "There is something missing, Lord... I just can't get it right."

Jesus says, "You will, child... Oh, there is someone special coming today. In fact, I need for you to go with Blasdon to help him and you can escort that special someone to heaven. Would you like that?"

"Oh yes, Lord! I would love to... When do I go?"

"Right now, Katrita..." Jesus calls, "Blasdon! My child is ready... You need to hurry."

Toby notices a car, one of those expensive sedans, coming down the narrow road toward the big rig. He says aloud, "They're going too fast... Don't they see the truck?! They're going to meet on that bridge... there ain't enough room!"

"Let's go, Mister! We've got to hurry!" Toby urges the big horse to an ever faster run as they race down the hill to the bridge below.

The driver of the car must have been blinded by the late afternoon sun as the two vehicles rapidly approach the bridge. At the last minute, the driver must have seen the on-coming crash as the vehicle brakes suddenly. The loose dirt and gravel of the old road won't hold the locked tires and the car slides to the right and off the road into the river.

Toby sees that the car is bobbing low in the water. The river is lower this time of the year, but at this point near the bridge is deep enough to swallow the car. Toby and Mister arrive at the edge of the river and Toby can see a young lady trying to get something out of the back seat. Toby thinks, 'Oh no! A baby's in the back'.

He drives Mister into the water and the big horse goes as far as he can before he starts swimming. Toby dives out of the saddle and swims as fast as he can to the sinking car. Mister returns to the bank. Toby notices that the truck driver has stopped his rig just past the bridge and is running toward the river from the opposite side.

Toby reaches the car that is tilting to the right. He can see that water is coming in the other side and it won't be long before the car is completely submerged. He grabs the backdoor handle and flings it open. He pulls himself into the car.

The young lady is frantically trying to get the seat belt disconnected from around the baby seat. Toby guesses the baby's age to be about six months. The water hasn't reached the baby yet. The mother looks at Toby and pleads with her eyes for help. The seat belt is stuck. Toby gives it a try, but the clasp won't come loose. He fumbles in his pocket for his knife. The water is rising faster and the car is slipping below the surface.

The water has filled the car and Toby is under water with the baby. He gets his knife open and he saws and hacks at the retaining belt. He thinks, 'Come on belt... Lord, help us! I can't do this...' His lungs are bursting as he keeps cutting at the belt.

Finally, the belt is cut and he grabs the baby. He gets outside the vehicle, but he has no strength left, it's all he can do to hold the baby. He can't get them to the top of the water. Suddenly, he feels a hand on the collar of his jacket and he is pulled to the

surface. Toby and the baby hit the surface gasping for air. The baby starts crying, which is a good sign. Toby still doesn't have enough strength to swim to shore.

A rope lands near him and he grabs it. He and the baby are dragged by the trucker to the bank. The mother is standing on the shore and she grabs her baby and clutches it tightly. Toby just lies on the bank trying to get his strength back. He is so cold... the water must be near freezing. The trucker must have called emergency, because Toby can hear a siren in the distance. 'Good' he thinks, 'I'll just rest awhile and then the emergency boys will warm me up'. The last thing he remembers is the trucker yelling, "Hey Mister! Don't go to sleep!" Toby smiles and thinks, 'Mister's not going to sleep... I am'.

It's about a week later. A car approaches the ranch and as it stops at the front, Kitty runs from the house to meet it. She hugs the old man that emerges from the car and exclaims, "Dad, it's great to have you home. We missed you!"

Toby remarks, "Well, it's great to be home, Kitty. I didn't think I was gonna make it there for awhile, but the doctors got the pneumonia out of me finally."

"You're a hero, Daddy... The papers were full of how you saved that baby's life at the risk of your own."

"I'm no hero. The only reason me and that baby is still here and not in heaven is due to somebody's guardian angel."

"What do you mean, Daddy?"

"The trucker and mother were on the bank and I know I felt a hand on the collar of my jacket pulling me and the baby to the surface. You can laugh all you want... I know what I felt. I don't know if it was mine or the baby's but some angel saved us."

Kelly comes in from the car with his father's overnight bag from the hospital. He says, "Kitty, he's been talking my head off about a guardian angel... in fact, he drove them batty at the hospital about it. They were so glad to get rid of him... I think they would have sent him home sick."

Toby smiles and replies, "Well, I know what I know... Where's the other boys?"

"They are up in the high country looking for Mister. It's really strange... him not coming home and all."

Toby says, "They told me at the hospital that the trucker said the last thing he remembers is seeing Mister heading toward the mesa. I don't think you'll ever find him. I bet he's with your mother in heaven."

"Don't get spooky on us, Dad", Kelly says. "He might have been taken down by wolves or a mountain lion. Don't give us that old Indian folklore stuff."

"I don't know of no wolf pack that could run Mister down and he's too crafty to get snuck up on by no big cat. No Sir... if you ain't found him by now, you ain't gonna. He's with your mother."

Jesus walks over to Kat sitting bareback on the big horse. He is holding a canvass in his hand. He says, "Thank you, my child. This scene is very beautiful. I'm glad you could get it finished."

"It was finally complete with Mister here. I'm glad you like it, Lord."

"I like all of your work, child. Have a good time in the high country."

"We will, Lord." Kat grabs her horse's mane and yells, "Let's go, Mister!"

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Faith Walks Softly

Visit Forty-nine

Brian hurries down the hallway of the hospital as fast as his seventy-six year-old legs will allow. He and Peggy had been out shopping and the message on the answering machine was urgent. He only hoped he wasn't too late.

They knew Henry was in the hospital and, in fact, Brian and Peggy had just visited Henry last night. He appeared to be getting well according to schedule and the message surprised them.

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life.
He who comes to me will never go hungry,
and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."
John 6: 35 NIV*

Heaven's skies are bright with the sunshine of God's love and mercy. As his spirit fills the glorious morning, the birds sing of his amazing grace. The tree-filled mountains and valleys blooming with the most vivid of colorful wild flowers speak of his creative genius. The sweet, clean smell of the air testifies to the purity of heaven and the holiness of God's will.

A young girl walks softly across the clover that grows in this meadow. Her step is so light that no sign of her passing is evident. She pauses to pick blueberries from the bushes growing next to the path and she enjoys the delicious fruit as she continues her journey. A basket of bread swings gently on her arm.

Faith returned to the Garden about fifty of our years ago. She hardly spent any time in the world; not more than a second or two, but God thought it best to bring her home. Faith walked softly on the earth also, but she sprinkled her life on many of us while she was here.

As Faith nears her destination, the lion pride gets up from the shade of the trees. They are excited to see her as she is bringing their morning meal. She pets each one and calls them by the names she has given them, "Don't crowd me, Junpa. I'm glad to see you too. Big King, I have plenty for everyone so be patient." She reaches in her basket and takes out a loaf of bread. She breaks it and gives each one of the lions a share of this living bread. As she leaves, she calls, "I'll see you later, my pretties. Play nice."

She sees Jesus waiting for her as she reaches the path. Her heart is drawn to His as he says, "Thank you, my child, for your faithfulness and service. You make me so happy."

Faith's soul is filled to overflowing as she touches Jesus' face. "Lord, I cannot express how much joy is in my heart. Your heaven is so great and there is so much to do and see. You have given me every happiness possible."

Jesus says, "I have a mission for you today. Will you go with Knowlin on a visit? It's very important, but you don't have to go."

"Oh, Jesus, I want to do your bidding. I would love to go."

Jesus says, "Thank you, child. Go with my love." Jesus calls, "Knowlin! Faith is ready to go."

Brian quietly enters the intensive care room. The nurse who has been adjusting one of the machines next to Henry's bed nods as she leaves the room. Brian had talked to Donna, Henry's wife, in the waiting room. It didn't look good; the family had each visited Henry for what appeared to be his final living moments. Henry had asked for Brian and Brian was glad he had arrived in time.

Brian comes close to the bed. Henry is laying on his left side and his eyes are shut. Brian hesitates. Maybe Henry is asleep and he shouldn't wake him.

He is startled as Henry says, "That you, Brian? Come close... I'm a little weak and can't talk too loud."

Brian takes the chair next to the bed and replies, "I'm here, Henry... What's goin' on?"

"Thanks for coming, old man. I need to tell you something." Henry was five years older than Brian, but he had always called him 'old man'.

And Brian had always answered, "I ain't as old as you, you old codger."

Henry chuckled and then winced at the pain in his chest. Brian says, "Sorry, man. You need to get your rest. Maybe I should come back later."

Henry replies, "Don't go, Brian... There ain't gonna be no more later. I feel the angel is near that's gonna take me home."

"I won't go, but you're going to be all right, Henry."

"I know I will be in just a little while and that's what I need to tell you."

Brian could tell Henry was getting agitated and he says, "Okay, Henry... take it easy... I'm here, so tell me."

"Okay... I'm calm... How long have we been friends?"

"Let's see... It was around the time... I guess over fifty years."

"It's exactly fifty years, knuckle-head... It was the time your daughter was still-born. It was some time this month; I don't remember the date at this moment."

Brian thinks a moment and replies, "Actually, today would have been her fiftieth birthday."

"Sorry to bring back sad memories, but that event changed my life."

"What do you mean? You were one of the deacons that came to visit us that day at the hospital... You mean because we became friends?"

"No... Not just that... I saw how strong you were and the faith you had and I wanted to have it too." Henry pauses to catch his breath and then he continues, "I had been living a lie for so long... Yes, I was a deacon, but I didn't know the Lord like you did. I hungered for the 'bread of life'; in fact, I was starving. I talked with the pastor on the way home from the hospital and he led me to a real experience with God. I made it public at church the next Sunday morning and was baptized that evening. You guys weren't back at church yet so you probably didn't even know."

Brian says, "I never knew... You and Donna were so supportive and we became close friends."

"I should have said something way back then, but I just couldn't find the right time and I was a little ashamed that a young guy like you was the reason for my salvation. Pride got in the way. Anyway, I had to tell you on this side of heaven."

"I'm glad you did... You know... you're not the only person that was affected because we lost... our little girl. Many others have expressed how much that made a difference in their lives in one way or another. Faith did touch many lives even though she didn't spend very much time here."

Henry says, "And you know what? I'm gonna tell her when I get to heaven. Do you think I'll be able to recognize her?"

"I'm certain Jesus will take care of that... He'll take care of the introductions, my friend."

Two are watching unnoticed from the corridor between there and here. Faith looks at Knowlin and they smile.

Faith walks softly inside my head,
Like little cat paws across my bed.

I'm not scared nor feel alone,
She has quietly made this home.

Faith walks softly inside my head,
Like little cat paws across my bed.

God whispers softly from above,
"I sent my Son to show you love".

Faith walks softly inside my head,
Like little cat paws across my bed.
She lights the path that leads to Him;
To guide our steps back to heaven.

*In this you greatly rejoice,
though now for a little while
you may have had to suffer grief
in all kinds of trials.*

*These have come so that your faith---
of greater worth than gold,
which perishes even though refined by fire---
may be proved genuine and may result in
praise, glory and honor when
Jesus Christ is revealed.
1 Peter 1: 6, 7 NIV*

Inspired by the short life
of Faith Rhoades and the
example of her family's faith.

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One Christmas

Visit Fifty

Dorian and Messia are playing football in Dorian's front yard. Dorian is the quarterback and Messia is the wide receiver as Dorian acts out a final desperation pass with the seconds expiring on the game clock. Dorian is almost five years old, but he has watched his dad play at the school grounds with Dorian's uncles on many occasions plus the television games and he knows football.

"Go long, Messia!" He yells as he drops back and throws an imaginary football toward Messia. She makes an imaginary catch for the final touchdown of the game. "Great catch, Messia! We win!"

They huddle up for the reenactment of another final play of the Super Bowl. Dorian says, "I hope I get that football for Christmas, Messia. Then we can really play."

Messia frowns and replies, "I like it better this way... I would have to catch the real ball."

"You'll do good... And... you know something? My mom says new neighbor's are moving in next door right after Christmas and they have a boy and girl my age. We're gonna have some kids to play with. We can play some real football."

Dorian looks across the street and sees two teenage boys walking down the sidewalk toward them. They get to Mrs. Blake's house and they stop. They look across the street at Dorian and then run up to Mrs. Blake's front door and ring the doorbell. The two boys take off running as fast as they can and cut around the corner at the end of the street just before Mrs. Blake opens the door.

Mrs. Blake opens her screen door and steps out onto the porch. She looks up and down the street and then across the street. She yells, "Young man, you better stop ringing my door. I'm tired of it... Stop it or I'll tell your mother."

Dorian yells back, "But, Missus Blake, I didn't do it. It were-ent me."

Mrs. Blake replies, "A likely story... You better watch out, young man. I've got my eye on you." She slams the screen and then the wooden door.

Dorian says to Messia, "She always blames me or yells at me for everything. She told Mom on me a bunch of times."

Messia replies, "She must be very sad and lonely."

"Yes... Mom says that Missus Blake and her husband, Frank, lived in that old house forever. They're the oldest people on the block. They use to be so friendly... Mom says. Her husband died a couple of years ago and she ain't been happy or friendly since."

"Maybe we can give her a Christmas present... that might be nice."

Dorian's face lights up. He exclaims, "That's a great idea, Messia! That would be like the Bible says about lovin' someone who hates you. I learned that at church. Maybe she'd be happy gettin' a present."

"I would think so."

Dorian hesitates in his exuberance. He says, "What are we gonna get her, Messia? Christmas is tomorrow and I don't have nothin'... Wait a second... What about that baseball Dad caught at the park and gave me. That was a homer from Mark McGuire... Big Mac even signed it for Dad... Wouldn't that make a great gift?"

Messia laughs and then says, "I don't think she would like that too much... Also, I think your dad would be mad if you gave away that baseball."

Dorian scratches his head and then says, "All I gots is a dollar left over from the money Dad gave me to spend on Momma for Christmas. I've looked at prices of the stuff in stores... It costs more 'an that... to get something special."

"Maybe you could get her a card... That is nice."

"A card costs more 'an a buck." Dorian looks down the street and sees Woody walking their way. He says, "Wait a second! I've got an idea... Woody has stuff to sell all the time. I'll buy somethin' from him. I'll be right back, Messia."

"This isn't a good idea, Dorian... Woody steals stuff and sells it. Don't get mixed up with him."

Dorian yells over his shoulder as he runs to his front door, "It'll be okay, Messia... Woody has good stuff too... that ain't stolen. I'll be right back."

Woody is twelve years old, but he has had enough run-ins with the police to make him an adult. He continues to walk up the street. Dorian runs out of the house just as Woody is about to pass Dorian's house. He yells, "Wait up, Woody... I need to buy something!"

"Dorian, my little man! What's happening! Did you say you needs to buy something from old Woody?"

"Yes... I need a Christmas present. Do you have anything really, really special?"

"You caught me just right, little guy... I've got this special necklace you can have for ten bucks." Woody pulls a necklace from the small paper sack he is carrying.

"Wow!" Dorian exclaims. "That looks like real diamonds! I ain't got no ten bucks, Woody. All I's gots is this dollar."

"What about that baseball in your other hand... That's Big Mac's homer ball ain't it... that your dad gave you? That would make up the difference... The necklace for the ball and the buck. What do you say, my little man?"

"Well... Okay, I guess... I do needs the necklace and if'n that's the only way... I guess so."

Messia whispers in Dorian's ear, "Is it stolen? This isn't a good idea, Dorian."

Dorian asks, "Woody, is this good stuff? I mean, it ain't stolen or nothin'. Right?"

Woody got a pained expression on his face. He replies, "Dorian, my man! I'm hurt that you would think that I have stolen merchandise. This necklace was purchased with hard earned cash. If you don't wants it, I's got other customers, you knows." He starts to place the necklace back in the bag.

Dorian yells, "No, Woody! I wants it... I just needed to know, is all. I wants it."

"Good man. Here you go... And I'll take that buck and the ball. Nice doing business withs you, Dorian. Have a great holiday. I's be seein' you later."

After Woody has walked away, Dorian says, "Messia, isn't this a great present or what? Missus Blake will love it. Don't you think?"

"I don't know, Dorian... It just seems funny that Woody would give up a necklace like that for a dollar and a ball. It doesn't feel right."

"But, Messia, remember... that ball was hit by Big Mac... It's worth a bunch, I bet."

"Won't your dad be unhappy that you gave away that special ball?"

Dorian thinks a moment and then replies, "It'll be okay when I tell him why I gave it away. It's for Missus Blake's gift... It'll be okay, Messia."

Dorian looks at the necklace and then continues, "I'm gonna get a lunch sack like Woody had and I'll put the necklace in it. Messia, meet me here tomorrow... Christmas... right after breakfast and after we open our presents. We'll deliver this special gift... Okay?"

"Okay, Dorian... Oh, there's your mom... Must be dinner time. I'll see you tomorrow... Merry Christmas, Dorian."

"Merry Christmas, Messia."

The next morning Dorian is standing in his front yard holding a paper sack in one hand and a brand new football in the other.

"Hi, Dorian... Merry Christmas."

"Hey, Messia... Look. I gots the football."

"Well, aren't you the special one... Is that the present?"

Dorian puts the football on the ground and then replies, "Yes... We're gonna walk across the street and puts the present on Missus Blake's front porch next to the door."

"Are you going to ring the doorbell? You know... to give it to her?"

"No... I think she'll see it when she comes out... Don't you? Come on, Messia. Let's go. I wants to get this over with... I'm scared."

"It'll be okay, Dorian."

They walk across the street and Dorian goes up on the front porch. He puts the present next to the door so Mrs. Blake will see it when she comes out to get her mail or something.

"Young man! I need to talk with you."

Dorian is startled. He didn't notice the police car stop at the curb. A policeman has gotten out of the driver side of the car and is walking up the sidewalk toward Dorian. His partner is getting out of the passenger side and he lets Woody out of the back seat. The two join the first officer.

Sergeant Sanders asks Woody, "Is this the young man? He looks too young to me."

Woody replies, "Yes... that's the guy... I told you."

Sergeant Sanders says to a very nervous Dorian, "Dorian? Our good friend, Woody, here gave us your name..."

"What's the trouble, Officer? Dorian's my son." It's Dorian's dad. His folks must have noticed the police car stop.

The officer turns and replies, "No trouble,..." He consults his notebook and continues, "Mister Simmons. There's been some information given to us by this other young man named Woody that we need to check out."

"What's going on, Sergeant?" It's Mrs. Blake. She has heard the commotion in her front yard and has come to investigate. "What's this?" She opens the screen door and notices the lunch sack. She picks it up.

"That's what we want to check out, Mam... We stopped Woody this morning to question him. Our friend Woody says he saw Dorian come out of a house where a diamond necklace was reported stolen. Dorian even tried to sell it to Woody, but being the good citizen he is, Woody wouldn't purchase stolen goods... He said he saw Dorian put the necklace in a sack like that and we just need to find out. Now we don't put a lot of faith in what Woody says because we know him so well, but we do need to check his story." To Dorian, he says, "Where did you get what's in that bag, son?"

"I bought it from Woody... I needed a present for Missus Blake and Woody sold it to me. I gave him a dollar and..."

He is interrupted by Mrs. Blake. "A present for me? You got me a present, Dorian? Let me see." She opens the sack and looks in. She exclaims, "Oh, my goodness! Oh... Oh... Oh!"

"What's wrong, Mrs. Blake?!" Sergeant Sanders asks.

Mrs. Blake pulls her hand out of the sack. She replies, "It's the pearl ear rings Frank gave me one Christmas... They were stolen the next day when we were away from home at our son's house for dinner. I never thought I would see them again."

Sergeant Sanders asks Dorian, "Did you steal the ear rings, Dorian?"

He is interrupted by Mrs. Blake. "That's hard to imagine, Officer. The theft was four years ago. Dorian was probably just starting to walk at the time."

Sanders turns to Woody and says, "Okay, Woody. Tell us what really happened. I think we need to search you now. What's that sticking out of your coat pocket?"

"Wait a minute, Sergeant. I don't know what happened, but I don't have no necklace. I don't know about no stolen ear rings neither. This is a sack with one of Big Mac's home run balls in it. Dorian gave it to me as a present."

"You mean one like this?" Mrs. Blake holds Dorian's ball in her hand. "This ball was in Dorian's present to me also."

"Let's see that sack of yours, Woody. You won't mind would you." Sergeant Sanders takes the sack from Woody and opens it. "Well, well... what do we have here? It doesn't look like a baseball to me." He holds up a very expensive necklace.

Dorian looks at Messia. She smiles at him.

Sergeant says to Woody as the two officers escort a confused young man to the patrol car, "Woody, you've done it again."

"I think this baseball is a very terrific present, Dorian," Mrs. Blake says. "But the ear rings are more than enough of a gift. I believe you need to keep this special ball... A autographed 'Big Mac' homer ball is too good to give away. Maybe we can go to a game some time."

"Wow! You bet, Missus Blake. Say! Come eat Christmas dinner with us. We gots more than enough."

"Oh... Thank you, Dorian. But I can't bust in on your Christmas."

"Why not, Mrs. Blake?" It's Dorian's dad. "We haven't been very good neighbors. Like Dorian says, we've got a big turkey and all the trimmings. We'd like to have you eat dinner with us."

"Well, I haven't been too good at anything for a long time... Yes, I would love to come to dinner. I've got a chocolate pie just out of the oven. I'll bring it."

The Birthday celebration in heaven by the Elect and all of the angels is continuing . Songs of praise by special choirs, soloists and groups fill the air with a sweet fragrance of glory. The light from God's heart is so bright and the colors are more vivid than ever with his love and mercy. This is the happiest of celebrations to remember God's special gift of love to the world. Jesus is the center or focus of attention and every knee is bowed in worship of Emanuel and his redemptive power and grace.

The 'King of Kings' and 'Lord of Lords' is working his way through the assembled mass of adoring subjects. He will take his rightful seat next to the throne of God the father. Jesus is speaking to as many of the redeemed souls as possible. The Elect reach out to just touch the hem of his robe; to feel the power of his glorious strength and gentle love.

He turns to one adoring soul and says, "Frank, we took care of that matter you asked about."

Frank replies, "Oh, thank you, Jesus... I shouldn't have taken up your time with such a trivial matter."

"I have all the time you will ever need, Frank. Your concerns and wishes are special to me."

Frank says, "I hope she is happy."

Jesus replies, "She is now. She received more than just a special lost gift; she found friendship and neighborly love." Jesus turns to one of his Guardians and says, "Well done, Messia... You will need to change your relationship to Dorian now."

"Yes, Lord... I'll miss our times together, but Dorian will have friends to play with now. He won't need an 'imaginary' one any longer. Happy Birthday, Jesus!"

Jesus spreads his arms wide to encompass the whole of heaven. His voice rings with power, "Merry Christmas to all".

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A Lucky Guy?

Visit Fifty-One

The cast's performance had been superb, the sets of excellent craftsmanship and the play of the highest quality. John and Helen left the theater in a joyous mood. It has been a wonderful evening; first, dinner at their favorite restaurant and then this marvelous play. This ranks up there with the most memorable moments of their marriage; dates as they call them.

When they had arrived at the theater, there was no parking available in the lots nearby. John had to park on the street some distance away. After the play ended, they had delayed leaving the theater as they waited to congratulate the cast on their wonderful performances. Now they realize their mistake of dallying and they are apprehensive as they walk down the dark, deserted streets.

They are holding hands and nervously watching for any ominous danger lurking in the shadows. John prays, 'Lord, protect us. I'll never be this stupid again. I promise.'

Just a block away, not more than a few feet from their car, Christo watches the nervous couple as they approach his hiding place in the shadows of the alley. Christo is a young man in his mid-twenties who has been on his own since he was twelve, when he committed his first crime. He has been running away from something ever since.

Christo has spent almost half of his life behind bars for his convicted crimes. He has stolen many, many times in the past and his heart is hardened to any feelings of guilt or remorse. Christo has killed with the very knife he now subconsciously wipes across his pant leg, trying to remove the invisible evidence of innocent blood. He smiles as he remembers the adrenaline rush of watching the fear in people's eyes at the sight of the deadly weapon.

The sinister expression in his eyes profess to the evil domination of his heart and soul; he is the son of Lucifer. The Lord of the Darkness has used his demons of hate, fear and inferiority-complex to push Christo into the deepest depths of hell on earth. No one loves Christo, not even his mother; who said he was worthless and beyond any hope. No one loves Christo, except God and... of course his sister, Paula.

John's words echo across the wide reaches of time and eternity, "Lord God, save us from the evil one and let your protection rest on our hearts".

In the not-too-distant dimension of eternity, the air is filled with the sounds of heaven. There are the songs of the blue birds and cardinals as they welcome a new and glorious morning. The gentle sound of water running over rocks is heard from the nearby brook. From the Holy City in the distance, the sweet voices of the children of God can be heard as they sing praises to their Lord.

The young girl steps out onto the front porch of her home and sits in the swing to enjoy the morning activities of a beautiful day. She appears to be no more than twelve of our years.

She is holding a baby who is asleep in her arms. The baby's name is Juanita. Juanita is one of the many rejected babies that return to heaven and Jesus gave her to the young girl to raise as her own. At that moment, two young boys of about eight of our years burst out the screen door.

Paula exclaims, "Blake! Juan! What are you doing? You startled me."

Blake says, "Sorry, Mom. Me and Juan want to go to the river and do some fishin'. Can we go? Pleeeeeease..."

Paula smiles. She isn't their mother, but she likes the fact that they call her 'Mom'. She replies, "Have you done your chores? Did you put your dirty breakfast dishes in the sink? Did you wash them?"

Juan hangs his head and replies, "No.... We forgot. Can we do it in a little bit? We'll finish before lunch...and..."

Paula laughs and then says, "Sure, Sure... Get out of here you two. Go catch us some fish for lunch."

The two boys say in unison, "You bet, Mom!! We'll get a bunch."

Paula smiles as she watches the two boys holding their fishing poles run across the meadow toward the gently flowing river. She gets up from the swing and places Juanita in the cradle sitting next to the door.

She thinks of her brother as she says aloud, "Oh, Christo, where are you and what are you doing? I hope you have changed from your wickedness and turned to Jesus. He's the only way to real happiness and peace. He is the only way to heaven. God, please give him one more chance".

Her heart feels his presence and she knows **he** is there before she turns. Jesus opens his mighty arms and Paula is drawn to rest near his heart. Tears of joy stream

down her cheeks as she experiences the love of God all wrapped up in the personage of the son; the Christ.

Jesus says, "I **have** given him many chances, my child. He has rejected me every time."

Paula pleads, "I know, Lord. But please don't give up on him. Please keep trying."

"I don't want to give up on him, but I have received a plea for protection from one of my children. The need for protection is due to your brother's evil intentions; a choice he has made. What would you have me do, child? Do I protect my own or try again to change a goat into a sheep?"

Paula replies, "Can't you do both, Lord?"

"I can, but your brother's heart is as hard as a rock. All efforts in the past have fallen on deaf ears. He has continued to live only because of your love. What will be required is a visit from you, if you choose. Understand that this is unusual... and it will be final. This will be his last chance to choose either heaven or hell. He is now threatening one of my chosen who has asked for my help. That is his fatal mistake. What is your decision, child?"

"Of course, Lord... Whatever you need, but will he recognize me?"

"He will see you as you were... before you came to us." Jesus turns and calls, "Blasdon, Paula is ready to go." The Guardian known as Blasdon appears beside Jesus.

Paula remembers and asks, "What about the baby and the boys, Lord? Who will care for them?"

"I will, my child. I've always cared for them. Go with Blasdon to help with his assignment. It will not take long. You'll be back before you know it."

Christo watches as the Morgans approach his place of hiding. They have crossed the final street and are about fifty feet from his location. It won't be long now... He can hardly wait.

There is a light coming from behind him! Someone is there! He turns and whispers, "Who's there! Cut that light! What...!!!"

He can't believe his eyes. There standing in the alley is a young girl of about twelve years of age. She is still wearing the same white dress with the tiny, red, cross-

stitched flowers at the neck and a silver cross necklace. Her eyes still possess the same look of love and forgiveness... that same look she had after she became a Jesus freak. The only difference in her appearance since he last saw her is... there are no blood stains covering the front of the dress where he had plunged his knife in anger.

He exclaims, "Paula! Paula, this can't be you! You're dead... I stabbed you. This is... is one of those illusions you get from doin' bad drugs...that's what this is."

Paula says, "No, Christo, it's me. I forgive you for what you did."

"Then why are you here? Are you sent from the grave to haunt me? This is some drug-related thing... I know it. This can't be happening."

Paula explains, "Yes, it is happening, Christo. It's not drugs... it's God... he sent me to try and convince you to repent... to turn to Him. He loves you more than even I do, Christo. Please listen to his call before it's too late!"

"This isn't real...I'm dreaming or hallucinating or something... Get away from me, ghost! You ain't here... I'm going to fix you!"

"Don't do it, Christo!!! Stop!"

Christo lunges toward Paula but his foot hits something and he falls awkwardly to the ground. Blasdon had tripped him as he represented a danger to Paula. Christo's knife slipped in between two ribs and he now feels the warm blood flowing from the jagged wound.

He rolls over on his back and looks up at Paula. He says, "I'm sorry, Paula. I didn't mean to hurt you... I got mad at you for trying to make me change... you know, my temper. I've regretted it every day since."

Paula knells beside her brother. She places her hands on each side of his rough face. "I know, Christo... I forgive you, but you've got to ask God to forgive you... forgive you for everything you've done."

Tears come to Christo's eyes, "I can't, Paula... I just can't do it. How can God love me for what I've done. It's too much to ask... I deserve my punishment."

Blasdon touches Paula on the shoulder and says, "We must go, little one... People are coming. They will help your brother. We must go!"

"What is it, John!"

John enters the alley. He says, "I don't know, but I heard something in here."

"Oh, John, don't go in there. It's too dangerous."

John exclaims, "There's someone hurt in here, Helen! Call emergency...911 on your cell phone. Hurry! Oh...oh... oh... there's an awful lot of blood! Here, young fellow, let me try to help."

Paula is once again rocking Juanita as they sit in the porch swing of her home. She is leaning back against Jesus who has his arm around her shoulders. She says, "I tried my best, Lord".

Jesus says, "We both did, my child".

"I guess it wasn't enough..."

Jesus replies, "I think it was."

"Hello, Paula."

She can't believe her eyes. "Christo! Oh, my goodness". She looks at Jesus and then back at her brother. "Oh, I'm so glad you came home... back to us. What happened? How did this happen?" She gives Juanita to Jesus and runs down the porch steps to embrace her brother.

Christo exclaims, "Paula! Don't break me in half. I'm happy too. You don't know how happy... Well, I guess you do know at that. But to a miserable guy like me who hasn't had a happy moment in all of his miserable life... this really is heaven. What a fool I was to not listen to you. Your visit helped, but I just didn't feel I deserved your love, much less, God's love."

"What happened, Christo... tell me?! What changed your mind?"

"What a pushy sister... Okay, I'll tell you... That guy in the alley... that John guy. He must have known I wasn't gonna make it 'cause he asked me if I knew Jesus... if I was saved. I told him no on both counts. Well, he started telling me how much God loves me... Yeah, I know... You and everyone else told me the same thing, but this time I listened. Anyway, he told me everything from start to finish, but I told him I didn't deserve God's love... I had done too much bad stuff and he just couldn't love me no more.

"Well, that John... he didn't give up. He said that it didn't matter how many sins we have committed... even one little old lie would keep us separated from God. God loves us all the same and he can forgive the biggest and worst sinner as well as the little sinner. Well... I believed him and I believed what God had done for me... you know, died

for me. Right then and there I asked God to forgive me... forgive this rotten, dirty soul and wash me clean again.

"John said I would be saved if I professed... told about what Jesus had done in my life. Right there in the alley, I yelled it out and when the ambulance guys got there I told them.

"You know... that John guy... He stayed with me in the ambulance and was there at the hospital until they took me into the operating room... I'm really lucky that he was there when I needed him..."

Jesus says, "It wasn't luck, my son."

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A Special Child

Visit Fifty-two

Author's note: This story is similar to Visit fifty-one, but then it's very different.

The cast's performance had been superb, the sets of excellent craftsmanship and the play of the highest quality. Mike and Florence left the theater in a joyous mood. It has been a wonderful evening; first, dinner at their favorite restaurant and then this marvelous play. This ranks up there with the most memorable moments of their marriage; dates as they call them.

When they had arrived at the theater, there was no parking available in the lots nearby. Mike had to park on the street some distance away. After the play ended, they had delayed leaving the theater as they waited to congratulate the cast on their wonderful performances. Now they realize their mistake of dallying and they are apprehensive as they walk down the dark, deserted streets.

They are holding hands and Florence is nervously watching for any ominous danger lurking in the shadows. Mike pats his coat pocket and says, "Don't be afraid, Sweetheart. I've got it covered."

Just a block away, not more than a few feet from their car, Christo watches the couple as they approach where he is standing in the shadows of the alley. Christo is a young man in his mid-twenties who has been on his own since he was twelve, when he ran away from a hopeless family situation. He has been running away ever since. Christo knows what he must do, but he is nervous and apprehensive.

The expression in his eyes profess to the fear that dominates his heart and soul. The Lord of the Darkness has used his demons of hate, fear and inferiority-complex to defeat Christo on every turn. He remembers the looks of contempt on the faces of people he meets on the street. No one loves Christo, not even his mother; who said he was worthless and beyond any hope. No one loves Christo, except God and that is what keeps him going.

Christo's words echo across the wide reaches of time and eternity, "Lord God, help me win the victory".

In the not-too-distant dimension of eternity, the air is filled with the sounds of heaven. There are the songs of the blue birds and cardinals as they welcome a new and glorious morning. The gentle sound of water running over rocks is heard from the nearby brook. From the Holy City in the distance, the sweet voices of the children of God can be heard as they sing praises to their Lord.

The young girl steps out onto the front porch of her home and sits in the swing to enjoy the morning activities of a beautiful day. She appears to be no more than twelve of our years.

She is holding a baby who is asleep in her arms. The baby's name is Juanita. Juanita is one of the many rejected babies that return to heaven and Jesus gave her to the young girl to raise as her own. At that moment, two young boys of about eight of our years burst out the screen door.

Paula exclaims, "Blake! Juan! What are you doing? You startled me."

Blake says, "Sorry, Mom. Me and Juan want to go to the river and do some fishin'. Can we go? Pleeeeease..."

Paula smiles. She isn't their mother, but she likes the fact that they call her 'Mom'. She replies, "Have you done your chores? Did you put your dirty breakfast dishes in the sink? Did you wash them?"

Juan hangs his head and replies, "No.... We forgot. Can we do it in a little bit? We'll finish before lunch...and..."

Paula laughs and then says, "Sure, Sure... Get out of here you two. Go catch us some fish for lunch."

The two boys say in unison, "You bet, Mom!! We'll get a bunch."

Paula smiles as she watches the two boys holding their fishing poles run across the meadow toward the gently flowing river. She gets up from the swing and places Juanita in the cradle sitting next to the door.

She thinks of her brother as she says aloud, "Oh, brother dear, where are you and what are you doing? I hope you have changed from your wickedness and turned to Jesus. He's the only way to real happiness and peace. He is the only way to heaven. God, please give him one more chance".

Her heart feels his presence and she knows **he** is there before she turns. Jesus opens his mighty arms and Paula is drawn to rest near his heart. Tears of joy stream

down her cheeks as she experiences the love of God all wrapped up in the personage of the son; the Christ.

Jesus says, "I **have** given him many chances, my child. He has rejected me every time."

Paula pleads, "I know, Lord. But please don't give up on him. Please keep trying."

"I don't want to give up on him, but I have received a plea for protection from one of my children. The need for protection is due to your brother's evil intentions; a choice he has made. What would you have me do, child? Do I protect my own or try again to change a goat into a sheep?"

Paula replies, "Can't you do both, Lord?"

"I can, but your brother's heart is as hard as a rock. All efforts in the past have fallen on deaf ears. He has continued to live only because of your love. What will be required is a **visit** from you, if you so choose. Understand that this is unusual... and it will be final. This could be his last chance to choose either heaven or hell. He is now threatening one of my chosen who has asked for my help. That is his fatal mistake. What is your decision, child?"

"Of course, Lord... Whatever you need, but will he recognize me?"

"He will see you as you were... before you came to us." Jesus turns and calls, "Blasdon, Paula is ready to go." The Guardian known as Blasdon appears beside Jesus.

Paula remembers and asks, "What about the baby and the boys, Lord? Who will care for them?"

"I will, my child. I've always cared for them. Go with Blasdon to help with his assignment. It will not take long. You'll be back before you know it."

Christo watches as the Morgans approach his place of hiding. They have crossed the final street and are about fifty feet from his location. It won't be long now... He is nervous but determined to do what he feels necessary.

Mike whispers, "Florence, I see movement in the shadows of that alley up ahead."

Florence replies, "Let's go back, Mike... Let's go back to the theater and call a cab. We'll come tomorrow for the car when it's daylight."

"It's okay, Florence... I know what I'm doing. Wait here and I'll check it out."

"Don't be foolish, Mike. It's not worth it. Let's go back before something happens."

"Don't worry, Florence... I'll be right back... Wait here."

Florence gives up in frustration as she watches Mike walk toward the alley entrance some fifty odd feet away. She calls after him, "Please be careful, Mike". She prays aloud, "Lord, please take care of us. Don't let Mike get hurt."

After Mike is within a dozen feet of the alley entrance he notices movement out of the corner of his eye. He glances to his left. He exclaims, "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

He can't believe his eyes. There standing next to the building is a young girl of about twelve years of age. She is still wearing the same white dress with the tiny, red, cross-stitched flowers at the neck and a silver cross necklace. Her eyes still possess the same look of love and forgiveness... that same look she had after she became a Jesus freak. The only difference in her appearance since he last saw her is... there are no blood stains covering the front of the dress as she lay motionless on the street after being hit by that car.

He exclaims, "Paula! Paula, this can't be you! You're dead... You died in my arms in the street. This is... is one of those illusions you get...that's what this is."

Paula says, "No, Mike, it's me. God sent me because he loves you as I do."

"Then why are you here? Are you sent from the grave to haunt me? This is some drug-related thing... I know it. This can't be happening."

Paula explains, "Yes, it is happening, Mike. It's not any reaction to your prescription drugs... it's God... he sent me to try and convince you to repent... to turn to Him. He loves you more than even I do, Mike. Please listen to his call before it's too late!"

"This isn't real...I'm dreaming or hallucinating or something... God doesn't love me... If he did, he wouldn't have taken you away from us."

At that moment, Christo emerges from the shadows and says, "Hey, mister... What are you doing? Who you talkin' to?"

Mike is bewildered at seeing Paula and is startled as this horrible man comes from the shadows with what appears to be a knife. He fumbles with the pistol in his pocket. As he draws it from his coat, he loses control and the pistol tumbles to the sidewalk. As it hits the hard pavement, it discharges. Mike hears a gasp and he turns to see Florence sink to the sidewalk.

Mike yells, "Oh, No!! Florence!" He rushes to his wife's side. "Florence, I'm sorry... It was an accident. Florence!"

Blasdon touches Paula on the shoulder and says, "We must go, little one... People are coming. They will help. We must go!"

Christo walks up to Mike as Florence is being placed in the ambulance. Mike is relieved that Florence only has a flesh wound. Christo says, "Hey, mister... Do you know Jesus?"

Mike looks at the repulsive, twisted face, the noticeable limp, and the deformed left hand. Mike notices that Christo is holding what must be a pamphlet of some sort. It would seem that what appeared to Mike to be a knife held by some drug-crazed creature was nothing more than a "salvation" tract. He replies, "No, young man. I don't know Jesus."

Christo says, "Well, you should... He loves you... You could be one of God's special children. That's what Pastor Jim at the mission says that I am... one of God's special children. Here... read this little paper thing. I'm suppose to hand these out. It'll tell you how to get saved." Christo hands Mike the tract and then continues, "Say, mister... Who were you talkin' to when I came up? It looked like you were talking to an old building..."

Mike replies, "I don't remember too much, but I believe I was talking with another special child".

Paula is once again rocking Juanita as they sit in the porch swing of her home. She is leaning back against Jesus who has his arm around her shoulders. She says, "I tried my best, Lord".

Jesus says, "We both did, my child".

"I guess it wasn't enough..."

Jesus replies, "I think it was. We'll give your brother another chance. I believe we'll see the "victory" as Christo puts it. After tonight, I think we'll see Mike become a special child too".

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A Child's Prayer

Visit Fifty-five - A Christmas Story

Lorrie is excited. Tomorrow is Christmas and she can hardly wait. She and her mother have just returned from the grocery store where they finished shopping for tomorrow's big feast. Her grandparents and Uncle Ted and his family will be here for Christmas dinner. She and her cousins have a great time when they come over to visit.

Lorrie has all her presents purchased. She is finished; well, almost finished. Lorrie has waited until the last minute on Colin's present. Why did she wait on a present for her bestest friend? Colin is in the hospital. Lorrie bought him a book and delivered it to him a few days ago. You can't count that as a Christmas present, but it still ran her funds short. She would buy him a present in a few days when she got her weekly allowance.

She takes her bicycle from the garage and starts to ride up the street to the park. Her heart sinks. Oh no, she thinks. Lorrie sees the Blake's car in their driveway two houses up the street. She scolds herself for her negative thoughts as she sees Mister Blake pushing Colin in his wheelchair to the back door of their house.

Lorrie pedals as fast as she can to catch Mrs. Blake before she goes in their front door with Colin's suitcase.

As she arrives, Lorrie drops her bike in the front yard and runs to the front porch steps. She exclaims, "Mrs. Blake! Colin's home! What's go'in on?!"

Mrs. Blake is so overcome with emotion that tears of joy stream down her face. She finally composes herself and replies, "Oh, Lorrie, it's such good news! The doctors said the tests came back negative. They can't find any cancer anywhere. It's a miracle... It's what we prayed for... they didn't think the last medicine would work either, but it did. We know that God made it work."

Lorrie exclaims, "That's the greatest news ever, Mrs. Blake! Can I see him? How's he feel? Maybe I can push him in his wheelchair around the park like we always do."

"He's tired from the trip home. Let him rest until this afternoon and come back and check." As Lorrie starts to leave, Mrs. Blake continues, "Lorrie, thank you for your prayers... you and your family. May you have a very merry Christmas. We certainly will."

"Sure, Mrs. Blake... We'll all have a merry Christmas... for sure."

Lorrie burst into her kitchen bubbling over with the good news. She exclaims, "Mom, you won't believe it! It's the best news ever! This is great..."

Her mother interrupts, "Lorrie, what are you rambling about... What's the great news?"

"Colin's home!! The doctors say he's okay and they sent him home. What a great Christmas!"

"That is wonderful news. What a relief for Marsha and Fred. This has been so hard on them. It's an answer to prayer... See Lorrie... Your prayers can make a difference. It certainly is a blessing from God."

"I don't know, Mom... I'm just a kid and I don't know the right words. God probably listens to grown-ups, but not a kid."

"I think it's just the opposite, Lorrie. It's not the words, but it's what's in your heart that God hears. Jesus made it clear that children are very, very important and in fact, he said they were what heaven was all about. I believe God listens especially to the words from a pure heart like yours."

"Thanks, Mom... I didn't think about that." Lorrie continues, "Mom, I've got a problem... I don't have a present for Colin... What am I gonna do? I'm broke and the stores will be closing soon. And I don't know what to buy."

"Well, we can handle the broke part. I'm going to call Marsha and tell her how glad we all are about Colin. While I'm at it, I'll ask what we can get Colin for a present. You peel these potatoes and fix the salad while I'm on the phone. When you get finished, I'll give you enough to buy the present. Since you helped out, I'll finish early and we'll go to the store. How's that for a plan?"

"Thanks, Mom. That will be great."

Lorrie starts working on the salad and when she finishes, she starts peeling the potatoes. Her mother returns from making her phone call. She says, "Well, Lorrie, we have a bunch of ideas. Marsha said that they were planning to get Colin a puppy or a kitten if he ever came home from the hospital. He has always wanted a pet. She thought that would be a very special present. You know what, Lorrie?" She continues when Lorrie shakes her head, "That pet store in the mall has their kittens on sale for \$5.00. We can go there and I'll give you the money to buy a kitten."

It's a special time in heaven. Christmas is almost here and preparations are going on everywhere. Colorful decorations have been hung from every house, tree and lamp post in every town in heaven. Familiar praise songs and old favorite hymns can be heard more than usual. The scents from the numerous trees and wreaths that adorn the houses tickle the nose and bring pleasant memories of past Christmas' to mind.

Jennie came to heaven only recently, but she has been busy at the pet store from the first of her arrival. Jesus knew how much she enjoyed animals almost as much as she enjoyed children. Looking at Jennie now and seeing a beautiful young woman, you couldn't guess that she was in her eighties when she left the world and stepped into this dimension. The punishment of the ravishes of time have been nullified by the hand of God as her purified soul floats in the holiness of His arms of eternity.

The simple act of belief joined with the mercy of a loving Father and the sacrifice of a faithful Son has purged even the slightest tinge of sin from Jennie's heart. God's paintbrush of grace has erased the lines and wrinkles of time; has transferred from His palette the richest colors of re-creation. She was twenty of our years when she reached for the extended hand of God and her soul was reborn into the Father's family; his church, at the electrifying instant of their finger's touch. The talent of the Master Artist is revealed though the eternal canvas of life and we witness the masterpiece of everlasting beauty and purity of a soul called Jennie.

"Here you go, Jolean", Jennie says as she hands a chocolate-brown Spaniel puppy to the young girl across from the counter. "This little one looks exactly like your dog that you grew up with in the world."

"Oh!" exclaims Jolean. "You're so right, Jennie. She's perfect. I can't thank you enough!"

"Don't thank me, Jolean. Thank the Master... thank Jesus. He made all the arrangements... not me. I just get the pleasure of seeing how happy he makes you."

"I will when I see him. Thank you, Jennie. See you at the celebration."

As Jolean leaves the store, Jennie pauses a moment and reflects. She closes her eyes and thinks of Jesus. She smiles as she knows he will be there when she opens her eyes again.

"My Jennie", Jesus says as he holds his faithful child in his arms. "We certainly made Jolean happy, didn't we. I knew you were perfect for this shop."

"Lord, you knew I always wanted to have a pet store like this one. You made it happen. This makes heaven... heaven."

"Jennie, you know that matter about which you are concerned?" Jesus continues when Jennie nods her head, "Well, to answer your prayer, I need your help. Will you go with Blasdon and help him with his mission?"

"Oh yes, Lord. I'm ready."

Lorrie is impatient; her mother is taking too long. The pet store in the mall will be closed before they can get there. Her mother is talking to her grandma now on the phone. Well, Lorrie knows that the mall is a short distance away and she can just walk there.

She places the five dollar bill her mother gave her for helping with the dinner preparation in her black purse. She swings open the front screen door and strides down the sidewalk toward the end of her block; a matter of great importance on her heart.

As she nears the street corner, she remembers what her parents said about not crossing this busy street. Well, this is an emergency; she must get a present for Colin.

Unknown to Lorrie, a black sports utility vehicle is speeding down the residential street; the driver has little regard for the safety of pedestrians in her path. Lorrie and the huge metal

creature will meet in the center of the street, when she steps from behind a parked car. A seemingly innocent incident of disobedience will result in a tragic nightmare for Lorrie's parents and friends.

Just as Lorrie is about two feet from the curb, she hears a terrible commotion to her left. She looks and sees a dog chasing a cat toward where she is standing. Lorrie stops in her tracks as the dog and cat reach her. In her fright as the dog chases the cat around her legs, she throws up her hands to cover her eyes. As she does, her purse flies through the air and lands behind a bush. The black monster flies by Lorrie; her homecoming in heaven has been delayed by God's mercy.

Lorrie takes her hands away from her eyes. The dog and cat are gone and she discovers that her purse is also missing. She looks everywhere, but Lorrie resigns herself that it's gone and her money for Colin's present also. She turns and starts back to her house. What will she tell her mother? She starts to cry. She prays, "Lord God, please help me. I don't have a present to give to Colin

As she is walking and the tears are flowing, she feels something rub against the back of her leg. She turns and is startled to see a tan and white beagle puppy holding her purse in his mouth.

As she bends down and takes her purse, she says, "Thank you, puppy. I couldn't find where my purse was." The puppy wags his tail and licks her hand. Lorrie continues her one-sided conversation, "Do you have a home, puppy? I think a friend of mine would love to give you a lot of loving."

She is again startled as she looks up to see a young lady in a white dress standing next to her. Lorrie doesn't recognize her. Lorrie asks, "Is this your puppy, Ma'am?"

Jennie replies, "He's yours if you want him, Lorrie. I'm looking for a good home for him."

"Well, my friend will give him a great place to live. I'm gonna give him this puppy for Christmas."

"He'll make a great present. You'd better get home; your mother will be worried."

"I will, Ma'am. Thank you." Lorrie picks up the little dog in her arms. When she turns, the lady in white is gone. Lorrie shrugs and runs back toward her house.

She sees Colin sitting in his wheelchair in front of his house. He waves as Lorrie runs up to him. He asks, "Where'd you get that puppy, Lorrie?"

"I've got him for your Christmas present, Colin. A strange lady just gave him to me."

Lorrie places the puppy in Colin's lap. The puppy is so excited he licks Colin in the face and hands. Colin laughs and says, "I love you too, puppy. Thanks, Lorrie. This is the greatest present ever. He looks like one of those dogs my grandma Jennie use to raise before she went to heaven."

"You're right, Colin!" Lorrie exclaims. "I forgot about that. She was a nice lady. She always let us play with her puppies when we visited her. Merry Christmas, Colin. Do you want me to push you around the block?"

"You bet... They say I won't be in this wheelchair too much longer. We'd better enjoy it while we can. Merry Christmas, Lorrie."

*Jesus said, "Let the little children
come to me, and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of heaven belongs
to such as these."
Matthew 19:14 NIV*

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A Whispered Kiss

Visit Fifty-nine

It didn't seem long to Wanda for she and Knowlin to pass between the narrow, yet wide expanse between there and heaven. They had lingered quite some time at the hospital watching from overhead as the doctors and nurses frantically worked over Wanda's lifeless, earthly body. They had brought her stilled heart back four times, but it wasn't meant to be and they finally gave up the futile attempts of resuscitation. She had worked hard to stay, but God called and Wanda answered, "here I am, Lord".

"Where are we going, Knowlin?"

The death angel replies, "up this hill to meet the Lord".

Wanda frowns and says, "I have trouble going up inclines or hills or steps. I get short of breath and my heart races and hurts".

"Not any more, God's Child...you are a new and perfect creation. You can do all things here in heaven."

At that moment Wanda sees Jesus... she knows it's Jesus because he looks just as her heart saw him the moment she accepted his love and forgiveness when she was a child. She cannot wait... she leaves Knowlin and races up the hill through the white daisies to the open arms of her Lord and Savior.

Jesus says, "My Wanda... my little wanderer has come home to her reward.

"Oh, Lord... Master... I'm so unworthy to be here. I didn't do enough; I didn't accomplish anything for you." Wanda's despair is so great, she drops to her knees before her King. "I'm sorry, Jesus, that I couldn't stay and do more for you... I was so tired of trying to breathe and my chest hurt so badly... I'm sorry..."

Jesus interrupts as he lifts Wanda to her feet, "Shush, Child. You did more than you should; you gave all you had. If I only had more like you, our creation, our world would not be as it is." Jesus wipes away all the tears from Wanda's eyes.

As he kisses her cheek, the feeling of despair drains from her body; her soul is transformed into eternal bliss and joy radiates from every pore of her skin. She has a feeling of weightlessness as she floats above the hills and valleys in the arms of Jesus. The vivid colors of the rainbow flash before her eyes as an awesome display of fireworks cascade across the sky.

“Oh, Jesus... I love you. I’ve never felt as great... as alive, as I do now. Am I dreaming? Will I wake up and be like I was before? I hurt for so long...”

“No, My Child... You will never hurt... you will never feel fear or loneliness or physical discomfort. You are a new creation and we will be together forever.”

“My life in the world was so short and I feel that I didn’t make a difference...”

Jesus says, “You did more than you know at this time. You planted so many seeds... it will be a short while before fruit is evident.” Jesus brings his child down to the hilltop surface once again. He continues, “I need to show you something... Look to the East... Wait, I’ll push this aside.” With that, Jesus reaches out and pulls open a curtain to reveal the world.

Wanda looks down into that imperfect dimension of waste and want. Her eyes finally focus, as they move closer through the pollution and filth, to a scene at a local church. This loving church family is having a special service; a final service in honor of another of its departed children.

Wanda exclaims as they draw near to the casket, “Lord, that’s me! Rather, that’s the old me. Wow! I look like I’m sleeping. I loved that shirt!”

Jesus says, “I believe it’s referred to as ‘your traveling shirt’. You did wear it a number of times on trips to special places.”

She looks around the church and exclaims “Are all these people here for me?! Did they all come because of me?” She sees her parents and her sister, brother-in-law and four little nephews and one niece. She sees her grandmother, aunts and uncles and cousins that are grieving for their Wanda. The church is overflowing with concerned friends and acquaintances.

Jesus replies, “Yes, Child... you touched so many lives. The affects of your life will ripple throughout the lives of those present today to touch many, many more and change hearts for the better. Listen as the Shepherd speaks.”

Wanda listens as the pastor reads from her journal and from various passages in her Bible. She exclaims, “Those are my words... what I wrote!”

“You’re preaching... proclaiming our relationship. Your words reveal your love and faith in me. It will impact many that are here today.” Jesus closes the curtain.

Wanda objects, “I didn’t get to see...”

Jesus replies, “You can see Charles very soon... It’s not the right time. Here are some loving family and special friends to greet you.”

Wanda turns to see a large group of heavenly souls waiting to welcome her to eternity. There are her grandparents and great-grandparents and numerous aunts and uncles waiting to give her hugs and talk with her. She is especially drawn to Michael, her cousin. He came home recently and they have a lot to remember. There are so many others to see. Some she knows and others that know her. She promises each one that she will come to visit them in a short while.

Soon her relatives have all departed back to the city down the hill. Wanda is excited to see familiar friends coming toward her. Mark and Martin lead the small group anxious to greet an old friend and renew old and fulfilling relationships.

Mark exclaims, “Awesome! I can’t believe it. I’ve only been here a short while and now you’ve come too. Wanda you’re gonna love it here in heaven... You’ll be blown away.”

Martin agrees, “You got that right, brother. Come on, Wanda, let’s go play some basketball before we show you a bunch of exciting places and introduce you to some of heaven’s great people. You won’t believe the new friends you’ll have here. Only the very best get in here, you know.”

Mark says, “and the food... Man! It’s the greatest and there is no end to it either. What’s good also is that you don’t get fat no matter how much you chow down. Come on! Let’s shoot a few baskets before Jesus wants to see you again.”

“I can’t do it, Mark”, Wanda objects. “I can’t play basketball... you know that. It’s too hard.”

Mark replies, “Don’t be silly, Wanda. You can do all things here... all those things you couldn’t do before are a snap. Come on... we’ll show you.”

Mark and Martin introduce Wanda to some new friends and they head down the hill to the city. As they arrive at a basketball court, Wanda asks, “Mark, where’s Matt? I thought Matt would come to meet me.”

“You know Matt. He’s working on a new song and practicing his guitar. Jesus wants him to have a part in the Christmas celebration. He asked for you to come by and see him when you get a chance. He doesn’t do too much basketball, you know.”

“Well, I don’t either, but it looks like I’m going to learn.”

“You bet you are...” Martin says. “Here. Take this basketball and dribble it... you know, bounce it... There... see... you look great. You do look like a girl dribbling the ball, but we’ll work on that. Go on... take a shot or two or more.”

After a little practice, they divide up into two teams and play until Mark’s team gets one hundred points. Wanda is on Martin’s team and they loss by only a few points.

Mark rubs it in, “we’re the greatest... No one can beat us... We’re sooooo good.”

Wanda smiles as Martin remarks, “He’s got one talent and guess what we do most of the time here. Can’t keep him off the courts. It’s mostly luck for him anyway.”

Mark counters, “Oh... sure. You’re just jealous, brother dear. It’s a different story when you win. Then it’s ‘all talent and skill’. Right Martin, buddy?”

Martin ignores his brother. He says, “Wanda, Jesus wants to see you. We’ll see you later. Just close your eyes and think of Jesus... You’ll be in his presence when you open your eyes... It’s a great way to get to Jesus at any time and it doesn’t matter how far away you are. See you soon.”

Wanda smiles as her old friends walk away from her. Mark grabs his brother in a headlock and they are laughing as Martin tries to break the hold. Wanda has fond memories from the world of these two scuffling and rough-housing.

She closes her eyes and Martin is correct. When she opens her eyes, she is looking into the face of her Lord.

“Did you have a good time, Child? See... you can do anything here that you want to do. There are no physical limitations.”

“I do see, Lord... There are so many things I want to do... things I want to attempt... to experience.”

“Well, you have all the time you want or need because there is no limitation on that commodity. Eternity gives you plenty of time.”

Wanda remembers Charles and she is sad. She says, “I wish Charles was here. We loved each other so much. I didn’t get to tell him goodbye.”

Jesus holds his child and consoles her, “It won’t be long before you are united with Charles. Like I said... time doesn’t exist here. Charles may live to be eighty or ninety world-years, but to you it will only seem like a few days that you are separated. Even less time than when you were separated in the world dimension and could only talk for hours on the phone.”

Wanda laughs and replies, “we did talk a lot on the phone late at night. We would even doze off together sometimes and wake up later to hang up.”

Jesus continues as they sit down in the field of daisies, “you can send Charles a message however. Would you like to do that, My Chosen?” He hands Wanda a yellow rose bouquet with white daisies.

“Oh, Jesus... It’s my wedding bouquet. How’d you know?”

“Well, I was there when you and your Mom were discussing the details.”

“Oh... right... I didn’t think of that.”

“I also know you wanted butterflies at your wedding, but they cost too much and would have been very difficult to get just right. Isn’t that correct?”

“Well... yes. I dismissed the thought after much consideration. It would have been great however.”

Jesus agrees, “I think so too. Well, we don’t have those limitations here either. Wanda, see your butterflies. They are your very own.”

Wanda exclaims as butterflies come from every direction, “Oh, Jesus! I’ve never seen so many butterflies.”

“And they are yours... Whenever you want them, just think of them and they will appear.”

Wanda says, “I wish Charles could see them... He thought the idea of butterflies at our wedding was pretty neat.”

“Well, why not send a few to him... You can, you know.”

“How, Jesus? How do I do it.”

“Just hold up your hand.”

Wanda holds her hand high above her head and butterflies swarm and buffet each other in their attempts to land on her hand.

Jesus continues, “Now, think of Charles and how much you love him.”

Wanda replies, “That’s easy.” She shuts her eyes and thinks of Charles. When she opens her eyes all the butterflies are gone except one yellow one. She brings it close to her lips and she kisses the butterfly. Immediately it disappears. She looks at Jesus in amazement.

He says, “They’ve gone to find Charles.”

A young man is standing beside a newly covered grave early this morning. Flowers sent by caring friends and relatives cover the ground over the site. Charles is thinking of Wanda and the good times they shared and the dreams they dreamed together. Tears have come and gone and returned again to visit many times.

Charles adjusts slightly the beautiful rose and daisy arrangement that had adorned Wanda's casket. The arrangement lies at the spot where Wanda's headstone will lie when it has been completed.

He is suddenly surprised to see numerous butterflies swarming around the flowers over Wanda's grave. The butterflies leave to visit other grave flowers, but soon return to Wanda's grave because her flowers are real and the others are artificial.

Charles smiles as he remembers that Wanda loved butterflies and he thought it appropriate that they were visiting the arrangement that resembled what Wanda wanted to have for her Wedding bouquet.

He reaches up and touches his left cheek as he felt something familiar. It felt like a kiss. He turns, but only sees a yellow butterfly fluttering away to taste of the flower nectar so abundantly available.

Charles smiles as he feels he has received a whispered message from the girl he loves. He touches his lips with his open hand and he blows a return kiss toward the butterfly. He knows Wanda will receive the return message of love.

He also knows that Wanda is all right and eventually, he will be also. He knows he will see her again one day.

***I can do everything through him
who gives me strength.
Philippians 4:13 NIV***

Inspired by the life and love of Wynde.
She and Chris and their love
for each other and Jesus have
given us so much to live by.

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Double Take and Give

Visit Sixty - A Christmas Story

Christmas is tomorrow and Michael is sitting at the kitchen table studying the family checkbook. He is afraid of what he will find and his fears are realized. They only have enough money to last until the end of the month when he gets his unemployment check.

Michael looks at Laurie and he shakes his head. They have to buy groceries and that doesn't leave any money for Jessica's present.

"Maybe I can sell blood again," Michael says.

"It's too soon, Mike. They won't let you."

It has been a hard two months since Michael was laid off from work. There just hasn't been any work available. Laurie lost her job last month also and their savings has almost been depleted.

Laurie suggests, "We could have a garage sale and raise some money."

"Not enough time, Laurie. Christmas is tomorrow. I don't know what to do."

"God has always taken care of our needs, Mike."

"I know, but is this considered a need? I hope so, because I don't have a clue as to how we can get Jessica a present this year. It'll have to be divine intervention."

"Can we go to the store? I want to go look at toys... Can we?" Jessica has come into the kitchen.

She is four years old and has that 'please, please, please' look on her face. Her dad can't turn her down. He looks at Laurie and says, "It wouldn't hurt to look... would it?"

She smiles sadly, shakes her head and says as she leaves the kitchen, "I'll get my purse. I don't know why, but I'll get me purse."

It's that precious, special time in heaven. It is a celebration of a glorious event in the world's strand of time, a promise fulfilled, a divine embrace. God's own son gave up

heaven to undertake the momentous task of righting a wrong chosen by God's most cherished creations, man and woman. Their disobedience brought them banishment from the perfection of Eden, the pangs of birth, the necessity of subduing and squeezing sustenance from a stubborn, harsh land and, the worst punishment of all, the finality of death; the separation from God for all eternity.

The only remedy for the illness of sin was the sacrifice of the innocent Lamb of God; the Father's most loving segment. Jesus had to come in human form, live a perfect, sinless life and give up his life so his blood could wash away the black of sin, in order that those who choose him will be allowed back into the Garden to fellowship with God forever.

There is much activity in Eden with decorating, cooking and choir practices in anticipation of the upcoming celebration. This is the most joyous observance for God's children and one they work especially hard to make special for Jesus.

And the younger children...you can hardly contain their enthusiasm, their eagerness for the special time to arrive. Their zeal is contagious and gives the older souls a heightened sense of purpose.

The rejected souls of heaven receive special attention as this occasion approaches. They didn't get a chance to experience this wonderful and exciting event in the world so they are made aware that, although they required no forgiveness of sin as they were denied the opportunity of birth, Jesus loves them the same as all of his creation.

Wanda has been in heaven for only a short period, but she looks forward to the celebration. Jesus asked her upon her arrival in the Garden if she would adopt a few of the older orphans. Wanda had always wanted children in the world, but that was not possible with her illness. Jesus knew this desire and also knew she would love this opportunity. Even though she was young herself and inexperienced, she was ready for this responsibility.

Jesus gave Wanda two young girls, Elizabeth and Cory, to live with her in her mansion. Wanda lavished all her love on these two girls and was spoiling them beyond belief.

Wanda has another responsibility in heaven. She has a talent for making stuffed animals and dolls. With all the rejected souls returning to heaven, she is very busy making presents for them. Beth and Cory help Wanda with this task. It is a happy time for the little family to see the joy that each little soul exhibits upon receipt of their present.

They are busy at their task this morning and have finished another dozen stuffed animals for delivery at the orphanage later in the day. Jesus drops by to see Wanda, which is not unusual as he does this very often.

Jesus asks, “Wanda, would you go on a mission for me? I need you to make a visit to the world for me.”

Wanda replies, “Oh yes, Jesus... When do I go?”

“Blasdon will go with you to shield you from the sin in the world. I need you to go now.” He continues as he notices Wanda’s worried expression, “I’ll be with the girls...don’t worry. Hurry, the timing is right.”

Blasdon holds Wanda tight and covers her with his cloak as they step between truth and false; cross over from purity into corruption.

Ronda has been at her job in the toy department at Khornes since eight o’clock this morning. She is looking forward to getting off work in an hour at four; when the store closes early on Christmas Eve. There have been a number of last-minute shoppers that have kept Ronda busy today.

There is a lull in business and Ronda reminisces about past holidays when Wanda was alive. This would be the first Christmas since her twin sister, Wanda, died and Ronda does not have any Christmas spirit this year. The two had shared a lot of happiness over the years and Ronda misses her.

A little girl runs up to where Ronda is standing at the cash register. She is very excited as she asks, “Ma’am... can you tell me where the stuffed animals are?”

Ronda looks down into Jessica’s innocent eyes and replies, “Go down this aisle and turn left behind the second aisle where the dolls are... see?”

“Yes, Ma’am!” And Jessica races off in search of a treasure... a dream, a gift.”

Michael and Laurie stop by the cash register and Michael asks, “What time are you closing today?”

Ronda replies, “Not for an hour... you have plenty of time to shop. Your daughter is very excited.”

Laurie says, “It’s really strange... All she talked about in the car was a stuffed dog in a red stripped short suit. She said it was at this store.”

Ronda thinks a moment and then says, “I don’t remember a stuffed animal like that. I don’t believe we have one... they might have it at Majors down by the theater.”

“Jessica was very certain it was here...”

“Mommy! Daddy! Here it is... I told you it was here!” Jessica runs up holding a stuffed dog dressed in red-stripped shorts. “It’s just like in my dream.”

Ronda says, “Where did you find that? I just don’t remember having that item in stock.”

Jessica replies, “You gave it to me.”

Ronda is confused as are Michael and Laurie. Ronda asks, “What do you mean? I was here talking to your parents. I didn’t give you anything.”

“Yes, you did... You were at the far end of where the stuffed dolls were and you handed him to me.”

Ronda leaves the register and hurries to the doll isle. There isn’t any one in sight. She walks back to the register. She asks Jessica, “The lady that gave you the doll... what did she look like?”

Laurie says, “Jessica, are you certain someone gave you this doll? Didn’t you just pick it up off the shelf?”

“No, Mommy... the lady looked like her.” Jessica points at Ronda. She continues, “She had a white dress on, but she looked like her.”

Laurie asks, “Maybe... Is there another sales clerk here?”

“No... I’m the only clerk here this afternoon. All the others got off at noon.”

“Is there anything wrong, Ronda?” It’s Mister Carman, the Assistant Manager.

“Not really, Mister Carman... This little girl says I gave her this stuffed dog and I don’t believe we even stock it. I just don’t remember this item in our store.”

“Well, it could be an old item that was overlooked. Have you checked to see if it’s in the inventory? Here... let me check at the register. It has one of our tags.”

Mister Carman takes the stuffed dog to the register and passes the tag across the scanner. He says, “There it is... plain as day... It says we have one of these items.”

“Are you certain, Mister Carman?”

“Ronda, it’s in the computer... If it’s in the computer, it’s right. Do you think Santa’s helpers dropped it into this little girl’s hands?”

“I’m not certain what I think...but I don’t believe it was an elf that delivered it.”

Mister Carman says, “Well, let’s check out the nice people and then we can close and go home for Christmas.”

Michael hurriedly says, “I don’t believe we can afford it. I don’t have much money...” He reaches into his pants pocket.

Ronda looks at the screen and exclaims, “This can’t be right.... Mister Carman, is this price right?”

Mister Carman calls back as he walks toward the back of the store to lock up, “Ronda, if the computer says it... then it’s right. Hurry... I want to go home.”

Ronda says to Michael, “The cost is twenty-seven cents with tax.”

Michael pulls out his hand and opens it to reveal a quarter and two pennies. He exclaims, “Well, I’ll be. I can afford it after all. Jessica, you’ve got yourself a special Christmas present.” He looks at Laurie and says, “I believe I see God’s hand in this... Don’t you?”

Laurie says as she hugs her husband, “Definitely, Mike. Very Definitely.”

Jesus has his arm around Wanda’s shoulders as they watch Elizabeth and Cory work on a number of stuffed animals that need to be finished and delivered before the celebration. He says, “I believe that went well, don’t you, My Child?”

“It always does, Lord, when you are involved. Happy Birthday, Jesus.”

“Merry Christmas, Child.”

Inspired by the living faith of our two daughters, Aimee and Wynde; although not twins except in their spiritually. They have helped us overcome many, many valleys in life; even the valley of the shadow of death. Wynde has gone to heaven, but Aimee

continues her earthly walk with Jesus. We don't know how, but God loves them more than we do.

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