

Saint Shorty

A Novel by Michael Andrew Friend

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Chapter 1

A toddler broke away from the hand of his mother. He weaved and toddled with near tip-over speed across the hall of the museum. It is not fair to say he stopped and turned, but rather he seemed to turn without stopping. In mid-turn, mid-toddle, having seen the fearful thing in an instant, he shouted "Bad!," and scurried back to his mother's outstretched hand.

The mother's countenance, almost expressionless, reflected a motherly resolve that no doubt came from too many crises that came without warning and departed without explanation. As an interpreter of faces, as one who tries to make sense of human artwork, it seemed to me as if this day seemed to her as the one long day of crises arising without warning and departing without explanation, with some pretty pictures along the way, the pretty pictures belonging to someone else and only to be viewed during certain hours. To many, such is life.

The toddler's expression of dismay came in regards to a painting proudly proclaiming what is known as German Expressionism. Its depiction of death and terror was bleak and black with dark purple and streaks of yellow. Its artist, long since immersed into the dismal topic he depicted so honestly would never be able to respond to this review by perhaps the youngest art critic to ever get in free to LACMA, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. "All right" after "All right" came in rapid succession and motherly monotone, as pearls strung by a tired craftsman, along with soothing back pats that in the past had so often dislodged dissatisfaction in the youngster. The combination quickly worked a consolation or at least silence in the young lad who was not accustomed to being startled at a place holding itself out as a place of art in good form.

The two museum patrons approaching from opposite directions shared a common puzzlement but responded to the case of the startled toddler with expressions quite different.

The man in the red beret, Shorty, reviewed the painting with a simple shrug and "Ouch!"

Emily, a woman sometimes called Sister Emily, a woman almost half again Short's 28 years, frowned in disbelief, then made a close inspection of the same painting titled, despite the yellow streaks, "Death in the Dark." This was a pretence for the benefit of Shorty, for she was familiar with the painting, but she was an eminently practical woman, experienced in handling practical problems in many forms, and she did not want to contend with a charge of not having done the necessary work to support her upcoming remark.

Much of Sister Emily's manner of expression was matter-of-factly, and so her tone and mien were as those of an umpire who listened but had already made a call. "I've known others to even use the Lord's name in vain at the sight. I know the Artist Jesus, and that's not His work. Those are not His brush strokes."

While there was not the pride of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes in her tone, it was a diagnosis expressed with authority, as a master detective, a lady Sherlock if you will, straightening out a fumbling Inspector Lastrade. Her point made, the lady, nattily dressed as if for a garden party, wide-brimmed hat and most of the niceties she owned, smiled at the child, the toddler. As she walked away, slowly, she gave the child an Ok sign.

Shorty was left to re-examine the painting. This took him barely any time at all. If Shorty was to be in a penalty box of poor art critics and had been allocated time to meditate her remark, he did not realize it. If time is as elephants strung trunk to tail, each representing a second, it took about an elephant's whisker for him to brush aside Emily's comment, for he was on a quest for the painter Corot.

Shorty went rather hurriedly down the halls looking more at the name plaques than the paintings, for he could spell the name he sought but he knew little more than the name, and that Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot was French.

Shorty seemed to toddle down the hall, somewhat like his younger acquaintance, albeit without the help of motherly consolation or direction. As Shorty went along, stop after stop to inquire of plaque after plaque for directions to Corot, he often gave a little hand tug on his belt, as was his habit. A hand to either side of the buckle, a quick tug side to side, these seemed to get the motor running and help keep his pants up. It was a puzzlement to Shorty why people with a bulge (who are not called "bulgy" for politeness' sake) should have trouble with keeping trousers where they are supposed to be. And they were quite nice trousers. Shorty liked to dress nice, especially when he was in a new place. But he was not on quick to the cleaners. His system was to put a penny in a suit pocket and wait for a tug or a jingle to indicate the time for cleaning. But trousers nice or shaggy, new or old, all seemed to treat Shorty the same, and it was one of life's little mysteries that Shorty had talked about from time to time - why does a man's bulge not work to keep pants up rather than down? But like hands just know which bath tap is cold or hot, after a time, his hands just did their little job, their little tugs.

Shorty's tug of the belt was usually two-handed, unless he had a hand preoccupied with papers or a handshake. When he walked, it gave the appearance to some that the way he tugged on the belt was the way he went. A two-handed tug could go either way but

seemingly one might discern the way from the tug. A little extra tug that way seemed to cause Shorty to go left, and so it went, or so some thought. But the matter was disputed and those that cared were few.

Chapter 2

Sister Emily sat alone at coffee in the outdoor section of the LACMA cafeteria. The day was bright all over, no "chiaroscuro" or spotlight on Emily, who sat just in the sun at the edge of the building's shade. The shade or sun difference was a rather big difference. It was Fall, and somewhat brisk for her attire.

Emily was quite pleasurable to look at simply because the effort taken in her appearance. One would not say she was homely, but certainly one would not say she was naturally pretty. It would be a stretch to say she was plain, that is, neutral in the looks department; the tilt was a bit toward homely but just barely, yet we will call her plain. If a pretty girl is like a melody, Emily was not a dirge, but neither was she a ditty, an uplifting song, or popular tune. The heart attempts to bolt its bounds in its excitement at the loveliness of the object of its love, but Emily had not stirred a beau's heart to such a pitch. This pattern, this history, this absence of anything resembling a beau worth having, had repeated itself so often and so long, that Emily had emotionally dropped the topic. Ecclesiastes does teach that history repeats itself but the Bible teaches many things. It is a step at a time even in the school of faith. And it is easy to apply a perfectly good principle to a place ill suited to it. Emily believed her future would be like her past, a future without beaus, and so she had expressed to her roommate, her sole confidant.

If one can imagine attractiveness approaching to break through the threshold of pretty goodness, toward the middle range of the third quartile of attractiveness, one is too high. If one thought to break through to the top half of the third quartile of good looks, one was even in the wrong department of good looks. The second quartile of natural attractiveness would be a nice fit for describing Emily, were it not for the garden dress with all its lovely colors. If one took the plainness of the woman and the prettiness of the garments and projected an arithmetic mean, an average, one would expect an overall, at best, average woman. Plain woman + pretty garments / divide by two = average woman; this might be the normal formula, the common math. But not so in this case. The pretty garments threw the formula out of kilter. In the scales weighing the plain woman on one side and the pretty garments on the other, the scales clanged down on the side of the pretty garments, and with the clanging, with the weighing, came the woman, weighing in on the side of pretty.

On a previous museum day, Emily had experienced one stranger who come up to her, a rather scruffy, poorly dressed much younger man, who simply thanked her for the effort that had obviously gone into her appearance. He spoke of the pleasure of her appearance, and sincerely thanked her for taking the time to look

nice. That day, unlike this day, she'd even worn her white gloves. There was an element of surprise in the young man's expression of gratitude, as one might particularly brag on a dark horse targeted by the handicappers to finish well out of show, one ostensibly allowed to run only to fill out the field. The highways and byways had surely been scoured in coming up with this entry into the field of fairly nice looking middle-aged women at the snack tables on the sunny side of the LACMA's retreat for small foodstuffs and snooty coffees.

The effect of patrons mixed at the snack retreat was a rather interesting one this day, and Emily made a pronounced contribution. Despite the evenhandedness of the sunlight, the seeing eye would see something a bit special about this middle-aged woman struggling back at life's handing her a handful of looks that had a tendency not to please.

One thinks of Monet's painting of his daughter who is herself painting in the out of doors. Monet's wife is supposed to have said that the day he brought in a beautiful model to pose was the day she left, so one does not seem to find, at least I've not found, Monet painting nudes. No "peek-a-boo" with Monet. If the topic was ever brought up at the dinner table, perhaps Monet complained of being tired of painting hay stacks and water lilies. "A model would be nice," he might have said. But no, his wife would not permit it. Certainly the notion of Emily as a nude model was not the sense. She was well dressed, decorated, all over, top to bottom. But one can envision that had Monet found her in the out of doors in her garden dress, he'd have said, "Here, stand by my daughter, and I will paint you as one of my own."

She read volume two of a palm sized full Bible, called the Bed and Breakfast Bible, a rare edition only because the first and only printing did not sell. The middle part of the Bible was her favorite, particularly Isaiah, and the Song, and Ezekiel, and other visionaries.

Her idea for a Bed and Breakfast Bible was that the reader could take it to bed, read it easily at the table, take it on the bus or to the beach. Horses didn't and don't come with glove compartments, and saddlebags as a historic fact speak volumes as to how little space seems to come with the adventure of getting from here to there. If one travels, one needs Scriptures (more than a saint). While they are Spiritual in nature, the Scriptures also occupy space in deed, an evidence, one of many, of God interjecting the Spiritual into the natural. So how to get the timeless Scriptures within the space allotted?

The Scripture engineering problem was not just a problem of space but of weight, all admixed with considerations of time, even temperature. When sleep wars to invade a good thought and one's

head is nearly under the covers (heat in her room was rationed), Emily wondered, how does one get the Song of Solomon comfortably in front of one's eyes without having to lift a heavy Bible?

It was to solve these practical problems that her idea for the Bed and Breakfast Bible came about. It was the only entrepreneurial idea she'd ever invested in. If a workable idea is seen as a canoe of particulars, it was the only one of her many ideas that she pushed off the mud bank into mid-stream, but then only to find that she didn't know where to go with the momentum of the river. Emily was not the poorest of the poor in worldly goods, but she was among the poorest in worldly guile and self-seeking. Also, she was among the poorest when it came to knowledge of the book business, and knowledge of how to sell things. She'd sunk two thousand dollars, most of her small savings, into this project. One small book store with an owner she knew had bought a dozen, and they sold slowly, or rather got lost amid the bigger books. So she mostly gave the books away.

Emily lived with Prudence the bookkeeper, the Mother of Many, in a parsonage that had been the home of the long-time pastor of the mission. When Emily introduced Prudence, she sometimes added, "That must make me Wisdom, because the Scripture says that wisdom dwells with prudence." But she came to prefer "Mother of Many." Pastor Chapter had been the second pastor after the founder. The mission had had only two pastors in its first eighty years, then four in its next ten; it was during this ten that Emily began her stay on the mission grounds.

A short aside for a joke from the mission mess hall. `How do you like your coffee?,' the missionary mess-hall host asks the visitor from overseas. `When I'm home, I have it with one lump of sugar. But when I'm out, well, put it this way, I like it with two.' `Make yourself at home," was the host's response.

This was John the Cook's favorite joke, his way of joking about scarcity. John the Cook's last name had been a mouthful. When he came to be an American, he changed it to his daughter's married name, Tibbs. He was quite elderly, the father of a widowed daughter who'd retired also at the mission. John the Cook had come from Bulgaria where he'd cobbled shoes for a living. After an eight hour day at the tiny cobbler's chair, crouched, intensely working on someone else's tight shoe or worn out sole problem, John had developed the habit of pacing with his plate as he ate, a habit which very, very slowly died with his years in America. When John came from the kitchen for his share of the daily portion, he would sometimes stand up and stretch in the middle of a conversation. In spite of John's joke, he liked sugar and was generous with it. Sugar was usually available at the mission, but there occasional shortages of food, and a chronic and serious shortage of funds to pay the utility company. Often times, there were threats of utility cut offs posted on the

entryway.

Emily and her roommate had a kitchen and often ate home, but they also had mess privileges and frequently took them. Some at the mission see life as a never-ending cycle of gaining just enough strength to suffer some more. As they chew their food, many congregate to chew their problems. There is a fellowship of the table that celebrates strength and provision, and this could also be found at the mission mess... sometimes. Emily sought fellowship among those growing, whatever the stage, those seeking a nearness to the Lord, usually in twos or threes but larger groups when appropriate to the task. But she did not hang back with those who splash misery on one another and call it enough to have agreement, those in the slow lane, as behind a bus belching miserable fumes.

There is a false pride, a full plate of religious show, that can surface at a mission, that likely would surface in other places if the same people were in those other places. There is a hiding out and justification from appearances that can creep in. Emily had once preached a sermon on it at the mission.

Emily began that sermon: "`For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.' 1 John 2:16. There is a pride of life wherein the rich exalt self, huffing at the poor. It is no less prideful to make your poverty your place of refuge, a shelter from which you scoff at the rich. Appearances, as a system of support, are as a broken reed, piercing the hand. Do not let your pride keep you from the rich brother who is poor in spirit."

The sermon was greeted with some wonderment, for the circle of influence of those four that heard the sermon did not cross with any circles the rich were known to visit. "Is there someone rich among us?" seemed to be the question on the four poor faces who had gathered on that rainy night. The four were three old women, one black, one brown, and one white, and a black man with disheveled hair in his middle years who tended to the grounds. The grounds keeper had come to visit, but came back to stay when his wife left him. I am told it was a rarity that J.B. came to service with his hair undone, even when he came right in from work.

One of these, the oldest of the women, Sister Margaret, often used the phrase: "I may have no sourdough (meaning money) but I have the bread of life (meaning the Lord)," but a life in this life with little money is one on a short tether in some respects, a life lacking some wherewithal that is even likely inappropriate to the tasks at hand. Emily once described money as "condensed kindness, alms, good deeds in a small package, kindness that travels, potentially explosive kindness." Yet a short tether can

be a condition leading one to prideful disdain for others not in the same shortened conditions.

Sister Margaret often used the phrase "sourdough" for money, a complaint really. She used it so often that it became hers, and with it the nickname "Old Sourdough." She walked so slow, as if her leg bones would not stand a jolt, but her voice was still strong and her zeal unabated. Rain or cold, for at least three services a week, she walked unaided, encouraging herself as she went the block and a half from her small house to the church on the mission grounds. After she'd walked herself to the mission, Sister Margaret would visit in all directions.

With what she had, Sister Margaret was most generous, whether the need was a passed plate or empty pocket. The widow with the mite who tossed it into the temple treasury was so commended of the Lord that it seemed to Sister Margaret to be a role to be sought, or at least enjoyed, and perhaps a bit too much so. She was much loved at the mission and many went to her for advice, looking to the benefit of the years inside and not so much the detriments of the years outside. Some make a resolution with spite and resolve to sit down in the middle and camp in it, but there was no spite in "Old Sourdough," just some touches of imperfection in the form of false pride, brush strokes if you will that discolored the picture just a bit. If the widow was down to one mite by design so she could qualify for the job, well it puts the whole thing in a little different light. At least one does not think of the widow in the Scriptures, the one down to a mite, as one who enjoyed it as much as Old Sourdough, although the Scriptures do say "The Lord loves a cheerful giver."

The matter of appearances and pride in poverty is an issue of the heart, disdain of gain as a pride of life, an idol to show one's friends. It was an idea Emily had thought through, one she'd found creeping into her own ways, a way of thinking she'd gotten over. Emily could mingle with the rich, poor, sick, well, smart, simple, it really made little difference because she knew this was not of faith; also, to look at a person as at one place is to miss where the Lord may have them even next week. And if all the people in the world tracked you like a satellite, their meter reading of religious accomplishment wouldn't matter anyway.

Emily closed her sermon to the gathering of four of the poorest with a review of a movie she'd seen in her late teens, a movie that her father would not have approved of but one from which she could now see a message for a sermon. "French movie director Luis Bunuel made a movie in which he gathered together a bunch of no-character characters to wreak havoc on a woman's kindness. She had excess and gathered the group of homeless to allow them to live in her big home. The movie ends with the bad characters gathered around a table that is supposed to remind one of the disciples gathered around Christ in Da Vinci's "Last Supper." He

is scoffing at what he says is such a ridiculous proposition, that the Lord would come and call the lowest, rather than the rich and swell who so often miss the Lord in their self sufficiency. But like so many Frenchmen these days, Mr. Bunuel forgot that the Lord reaches down, then changes people. If the Lord could not reach us in our imperfection, He could never reach us. We can only understand the glory in understanding the shame carried outside the camp for the bride. We cannot understand the cross unless we understand God judges, the cross is a story of judgment taken away outside the camp. But the redeemed, God changes. Bunuel had no faith. If you have no faith, you make silly movies, either on film or the ones you act out yourself."

Again, the expression of the gathering of the four was "What?" The number of art films seen by those that gather at the mission on a rainy night for a mid-week sermon is almost none, and that can only be said if one rounds up by adding "almost" to none. This was one of Emily's early sermons at the mission, one she did not repeat.

Notches in wood to count sacrifices made is another form of foolishness that can creep into the mission.

In introducing you to Emily's world, and the museum was not her everyday world, we turn to yet another category of foolishness that arises even at missions.

It was John the Cook whose brother had lost his spouse, and wrote back to the old country for a woman he'd known for years to come to America and marry him. With the term "old country," we do not mean to imply the Lord made it later but rather in the sense of where John was raised (not to imply John the Cook was somehow deflated to get him past customs when he came to America). I trust you find my English satisfactory but it is a worrisome language when one wants to talk about things and get the matter just right.

Some cultures do not understand singleness, and it was John the Cook who'd all but suggested to Emily that she put herself up for grabs as a mail order bribe, even if she had to pay her own postage. At a trim but ample five feet, the "postage" to Bulgaria might not have been that much, but Emily wasn't about to go. It was a sore test of forgiveness. Sister Emily had per buttons and "spinster" was one of those buttons.

John the Cook was a quiet and proud man, a dignified man, a nice man, but he could hammer on a sensitive middle-aged woman's feelings like she were shoes hung on a cobbler's work horn.

There came a day that John the Cook had an experience in the pantry that he would not tell on himself, but one of the men in the "program" brought the story to Emily. John the Cook had

noticed can labels being lost to mice. He didn't want the story to get around, but had trouble getting the snap-type mouse trap triggered. He'd reluctantly asked for help along those lines, and that got the mice-in-the-pantry story circulating. But no mice were caught.

John the Cook tried rat glue, a stamp-pad sized pot of glue with the lid peeled off. He set it on the next to top shelf, and forgot about it. One day, as he searched the shelves on one side, he turned and put his hand in rat glue. Tight, dark quarters, hand up to the knuckles in rat glue, the combination caused John the Cook to lose it, and when John the Cook lost his dignity, which he didn't do often, he made up for lost time. This time he really lost it. He lost it out loud; he lost it in the kicking sense, he lost it in the cursing sense; he lost it in the stark fear sense. There were cans all over the pantry.

But in a merciful sense, he thought, the pantry was his territory to himself. He thought no one heard. One of the men in the men's program overheard - Emily was informally in charge of the men's program - and came and told her of the incident.

The story was the most fun she'd had for some time, and it would have been wasted had it occurred just before the mail-order-bride suggestion, the pay-your-own-postage hint. But it occurred just after, and it somehow helped Emily forgive John the Cook.

It was a story she didn't circulate, but one she thoroughly enjoyed. It was not like Emily to thank God for other people's problems, but she was curious about the details of how God works in all situations, and it is safe to assume she wondered if God caused John the Cook to put his hand in the rat glue because he'd hurt her feelings. Did God Almighty, the great God, maker of heaven and earth, the One who brought Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, the God who brought Job through the loss of all that he had and the wilderness of miserable comforters, and brought Daniel through the lion's den, and set the ordinances that govern the sun, moon and the seas, did He cause John the Cook to stick his hand in the rat glue because he hurt Emily's feelings and then put a watcher nearby to tell of it? I don't know for sure but find it a very interesting question.

Another interesting aspect is to think of this matter from the perspective that the Lord's book says in simple paraphrase, "Don't gossip," and the Lord's book says that God does not tempt any man to sin, so did God put the watcher outside the pantry thinking or hoping all the time that he wasn't going to tell, keeping in mind that Emily really needed a whisper along these lines to perk her up and help her forgive John the Cook who had hurt her feelings? I'm not a theologian, just a messenger, and I don't know the answer to that question either, but that's not to say that I don't think about these things. I find this question

also very interesting.

I have it on good authority that when Emily later wrote a sermon on forgiveness and how unforgiveness can impede one's prayers, there were notes in the margin of "John the Cook" followed in close proximity by "rat glue." But the incident did not make it into her sermon.

Emily was very, very private, and her stories from the pulpit (all preachers have stories) were mostly of travelling evangelists of old, stories she'd gotten from her parents or out of books. If you live on mission grounds, you don't lack for stories to fill a sermon. Emily had resigned herself to John the Cook on occasion saying something she'd need to forgive; elderly men from old countries can change because Scripture says they can change but only with prayer, prayer long and persevering, like those that brought down the Wall that separated Berliners east and west, old and new.

It did not help that gap-toothed, round-as-a-barrel Beatrice Bath had been widowed and remarried within eight weeks of the day when the husband's shadow was gone from the earth, the day he lost his home of the flesh. Beatrice and her husbands, old and new, had not missed a Sunday at the mission church, counting the Sunday of his funeral as one in attendance.

It was not so much the topic as the control, the maneuvering in John the Cook who ought to tend to things in his pantry and leave Emily's pantry alone. It was the week before the rat glue incident that John the Cook had made the crack about mail order bride, which was three weeks after Beatrice had been married at the mission church, and it was the week after the rat glue incident that Emily would meet Shorty at the LA County Museum of Art.

Emily had a reasonable income, one that provided for somewhat more than the bare necessities, a budget for a rare nice dress to brighten up a day at the museum. When Emily bought a nice dress, it was really nice. When she left the mission grounds on a museum day, she would sometimes cover up the nice dress with a not nice coat, lest she get a reputation of being rich amidst the poor.

Emily sat reading her Bed and Breakfast Bible, smiling. One couldn't be sure of the particulars, if she was smiling at the Lord's dealing with a saint not yet saintly, or John the Cook with his hand in rat glue. This is not to say John the Cook couldn't qualify as a saint. One thinks of the famous book by Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God, and his cultivating the presence of the Lord amidst the pots and his daily duties. Nor is it up to me but rather the Lord to tell who is a saint, that is to say a real believer struggling with real

faults.

Shorty had found no Corot, saw Emily sitting alone, and sat half in the shade, pondering whether to ask her where he'd seen her before and if she could help and not rebuke him. He sat next to her table and sent a few tentative glances, as little spit balls of distraction, to see if she'd look up from her reading, as if to open the door to a question or two.

"Excuse me. I've seen you somewhere before. And not in such...well, you look very nice. I'm not being forward, but I do believe I've seen you before, and you looked different."

Shorty was not one to be forward. On the richter scale of social skills, Shorty was nothin' shaking, and it was a mustering of some courage to risk a personal question of someone whose only previous words his way were ones of rebuke. It was hard to do poorly, walking the halls of a museum, Shorty thought, yet he'd managed to get into trouble on his first visit. It was as if he were supposed to have sensed that on his first visit, his tether was no more than say the first floor minus one, the very bottom floor, the lowest perhaps starting floor, perhaps the Egyptian section. "Why don't you start with the beetles or old coins perhaps," Shorty muttered under his breath as he walked in, as if reading behind the furrowed brow of the museum ticket inspector. Despite his size, Shorty was not easily intimidated, yet LACMA had achieved just such a feeling in him. But it was a feeling that he easily brushed aside, until he met Emily at the picture that scared the toddler.

Shorty was genuinely curious. If a circus barker had a pitch of "How did this not very good looking woman get almost attractive, and where did you see her before?," Shorty would have instantly bought a ticket. And he needed help and the woman seemed to know art, and in fact was adorned a bit by same, as even Shorty saw quite plainly. Also, when she'd spoken, they'd seen eye to eye, which is to say she was five feet like Shorty, not to imply they agreed on art. And so he posed his question, or rather Shorty's question seemed to bubble up of its own accord.

"I'm a chaplain at the downtown jail, the men's facility."

"Ah, that could explain it.."

"Perhaps..."

Shorty cut her off. "I'm hoping to find a painting of Corot, but the lady at the front desk could only send me to a general area where he might be found. And I didn't find him."

"I'm finished, and you're not eating. Come, I'll show you. I enjoy him although the museum's selection is limited. There is

one on the second floor and it is quite lovely. It depicts the Seine and an old bridge." Shorty knew little of French rivers and their names, and may have taken the title as a small group that had been certified sane and for some reason had been accumulated around a bridge to discuss the accomplishment.

LACMA planned refreshments for patrons cafeteria style, somewhat like the pick-and-choose format which is the nature of the museum. "Cafeteria style" was the museum's charge to the architect. They obviously knew that patrons of the art were nevertheless often not to be trusted, so get the money up front and don't figure they're going to tip.

Emily and Shorty were up and walked briskly, silently, until she presented Shorty to the artist Corot's depiction called "Seine and Old Bridge, Limay."

It was odd, Shorty thought, that his first art lecture would begin with talk of chickens and eggs.

"Corot was imminently an artist who painted what he saw. The question often debated is whether art imitates life or the other way around. It is somewhat like the chicken and the egg debate. Philosophers argue which came first. I read Genesis to say the answer is the chicken, although I would not make it a point of doctrine. One can normally tell when God is at work, but where and when He started is admittedly a more difficult question. I believe art imitates life although the brush strokes are often distorted, and of course, life in the sense of day-to-day life, is also distorted in some degree. You've heard of the fall."

"Did art fall?" Shorty asked.

"No, I mean the Garden. You've heard of Adam and Eve and the Garden and the fall."

"Yes, the Sisters told me about that. By the time I was old enough to hear it from the priest, I was out of the lecture hall."

"The artist does not start from scratch, as may well be the case with our chicken."

Emily tended toward long sermons, whether from the pulpit or the gallery. She was slow to start but hard to stop if she liked the topic. "The artist does not find himself or herself in the dark scratching around on nothing as a start toward painting something. Rather, the artist starts from the work of the original Artist in some sense."

"Nice bridge."

"It is a fine bridge. But it cannot be said that art imitates life in the sense of how the gospel of John uses the term `life.' Artists often imitate death, as in the case of the painting where we met this morning."

Shorty nodded.

"Death is bad, that's one of my big three, and while it is around and has to be dealt with, it should not be bothering us on an afternoon without verbs."

"An afternoon without verbs?"

"On our days off."

"I see."

"When you pronounced the name of the Lord over darkness, you fundamentally lied about His work. Don't lie about the Artist. You may well speak of the spiritual behind the work, the spiritual dimension, but in that case, you attributed the work to the wrong source."

"Right playing field, wrong locker room," said Shorty.

"Exactly, well, you don't know anything about art and artists yet, but I'm sure you'll catch on quickly. This is quite lovely. It was painted rather late in his career."

After a few moments pause, Emily noticed a little girl pass them and go to the next gallery. The little girl was generously freckled, and it was to her that Emily pointed as she began her next topic. "Now have you heard of pointillism, art by dots as it were? There's an example down the hall."

And so went Shorty's first two hours with Emily. At the Japanese bookstore, with a book titled "The Art of Japanese Joinery," fitting incongruous pieces together after making them congruous, which is where the art comes in, Emily began a talk on marriage.

"If you're going to birth one that's hungry, be ready to set a table, that's what I tell my classes. I tell them about the Lord, but I also remind them they're made in the image of God, although that image is as a shattered work of art. In short, I remind them they are people. Come, I'll show you something."

They proceed out of the Japanese bookstore on the LACMA grounds to the sun lit court to the side of the ticket windows. Here, she stood Shorty in a place alone where his shadow was long and conspicuous.

"Most people don't know they're people. If you cast a shadow and

it is a people shadow, then you have a second witness. You are people. Everyone's shadow is dark. Whether they're black or brown or yellow or white, the shadow is dark. The natural man casts a dark shadow because the light of the Lord does not shine through, but our shadow also reminds us that we are people. The spiritual man can shine the light of the Lord, and that's the goal. It is very simple."

"Is it?", Shorty said, looking for a way out. The accumulation of things that he did not understand was on tilt. He felt as a basketball hoop into which the score board said there had been many dunks, but the hoop just seemed empty.

"But being people does not make you God's people. The new covenant, Hebrews chapters 8 and 10, clearly shows that you can be people but you must be "my people" it says."

"I'm lost."

"Exactly," said Emily. If we don't meet again, I do want to leave you with some summary: Jesus is alive. People are people. Death is bad. If you understand those three things, you're well on your way to art appreciation."

"I'd like to find out more about Corot."

"There are no museums in the area with generous collections of Corot. As I recall, there is one in Washington, D.C., but that is a bit far. To learn about Corot, you'll have to go to books. For that, you'll need to go to the LA Central Library downtown."

"I know the place. I live downtown, and work downtown."

"It is open on Sunday from 1 o'clock. You can park for \$1 if you have a library card or get a card. I often spend Sunday afternoons there. I can meet you at the main entrance at 1:30, and will show you where to find many books on Corot."

Shorty agreed, although I suspect it was in part because he believed the library would more strictly enforce a quiet code, and he could spend a little more time looking. Art is for looking, or so many believe who don't know much about art.

Emily was a docent at heart but her views were not permitted to those that gathered in museum aisles to hear docents tell of the art that hangs behind them. Hers was a smaller, more select, audience - today, Shorty.

This was their first day together.

Chapter 3

The next day, Sunday, Shorty aligned his little and old car in a most underground niche in the parking caverns of the LA Central Library. Sister Emily did likewise.

Her means were small but adequate, her car also small and old. Missionaries are supposed to have old cars. It is doctrine in some places, and Emily came from a line of missionaries mixed with military chaplains whom some would put in the missionary category. One might debate whether she was a missionary, since she was domestic and missionary means foreign to many. If one sneaks into the Fuller Seminary library in nearby Pasadena, missionary means foreign and is found on the top floor. Emily did sometimes sneak into the students-and-faculty-only Fuller Seminary library but did not agree with its classification that "missions" means foreign. She considered herself continuing the family line of missions. While she was domestic, her car was small and old and foreign, whereas Shorty's was small and old and U.S.

They met at the main entrance. Emily was not dressed in her finery but rather pants and open top coat. It was chilly. Shorty came with his red beret, slacks and sport coat. They proceeded to get Shorty validated (parking wise) and into card carrying status, and oriented, for there were many floors.

Boswell said of Samuel Johnson that, or approximately that, he was a man born to grapple with whole libraries. Shorty's biographer, that is me, your narrator, dear reader, can report that Shorty was not a reader except of murder and mysteries admixed occasionally with some sad philosophy.

I have it on reliable sources that Emily was the library book-putter-upper's worst enemy, or full employment act. She'd get more out of a book in less time than anyone you'd ever see, and on a good afternoon, she could leave the library staff a full thirty books to put up. Like a kid's toys fascinate for a time, so Emily, childlike in her faith and curiosity, would go from book to book, or from things worth seeing to something else worth seeing, person to person, need to need. There seemed many illustrated sermons in God's creation which never ceased to fascinate yet puzzle her, yet it seemed to reluctantly give up its secrets with prayer and perseverance. She was a reader yet she did not trust in her own understanding but sought knowledge that was gift-wrapped, whether or not bound in a book.

She once did an illustrated sermon in which she brought in a small rock, a bonsai plant for the role of a tree, and a loaf of bread, and she talked to all three. She would look at the rock or tree and ask, "Do you have a resume? Did God make you to fit

you into a parable or to say something in stone or bark and sap that He wanted to say? One does not attract a bird so much by the color but by the feeder. The central question is life and what will sustain life." Then from that premise, to the loaf of bread, she asked its roll, excuse me, role: "Bread, do you have a resume? Were you made so the Lord could be called the Bread of life?" Within a small circle, Emily was famous for her illustrated sermons. She once gave a sermon on Joseph's coat of many colors based on her garden dress, the dress she wore when she met Shorty.

Rarely would she read a whole book, but when she did find a special book worth a full read, she took notes. If she owned a book, and she owned many, her library consisting of mostly the dollar specials, she indexed them up front till the notes poured out to the back pages. Her library grew to a prize possession, despite the budgetary limitations. Her library to some extent shaped her, and her impact on a book was also considerable.

If you borrowed a book from Sister Emily, you only got the "annotated version" with her index and notes and corrections throughout. Even her art books were annotated, but her reading was all over the place. She sought to know more of God in all the places she thought He might be found. At least, that was the way it was described to me. Sister Emily saw traces of God in math books, literature books, art books.

Jewish commentaries on the Scriptures were among her favorites. If the time-space continuum had made a time and place for her to do it, she'd have been a Hebrew scholar. But as it was, she'd never even gotten through the Hebrew alphabet, although she'd read many of the Rabbis, cover to cover, particularly their commentaries on Isaiah, and the Song (as she called the Song of Solomon), and Ezekiel.

Emily introduced Shorty to the library, starting at the bottom.

"I rather suspected we'd start on the low floors," Shorty said.

They proceeded down the escalator past the business section and theology and philosophy floor and even went down for a peek at the bottom floor, called the history floor. But it was tour only, and they immediately came up the escalator to the main floor, around to the up escalators, and up to the art floor. As they proceeded to this next-to-top floor, Emily pointed to where she would meet him later.

"When we get together..."

"If I get lost you mean."

"You'll not get lost. I'll show you where you need to start,

then I'll leave you and meet you at the top floor. You can see it up there. I call it `nap row.' I'll meet you in that row of nice soft chairs on the top floor in the fiction area. That's where I'll be. If its not crowed, we may even be able to talk a bit but it will soon get crowded on a Sunday."

They proceeded into the French section of the art department and found seven books on Corot.

"I should have told you to bring a tote bag. How are you going to study art and not have a tote bag? You browse a bit at these, look around at the other books as you like, and I'll meet you at nap row. If I'm not there immediately, I'll be there shortly."

Shorty proceeded to browse at art books from Russia, and Italy and others places. He looked briefly to see if he could find art books from his native Poland but found none. "Poland I could probably find in the history floor, most conquered countries section, or the poetry floor, if there is a sad poets section," he thought out loud. Shorty sometimes joked that Poland was God's entry in the drawing for most conquered country. Shorty had a small-bet gambling problem, and as people do, he attributed to God his own weaknesses.

"I'll just take these books on Corot," looking around, as if to ask whether he could take so many.

As he proceed down the hall, up the escalator with seven books, one of which was quite large, filling up Shorty's front from belly button to nose, he realized Emily was right about the tote bag. "I should have brought my attache case. No, it would need to bulge to deal with these, as I do with cheeseburgers."

Shorty had a salt addition and much of that went to cheeses. As Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt from turning back, Shorty was, well, ...one may say at risk along these lines.

He passed the front desk of the literature section. As he proceeded just into the stacks, a tall, barely whiskered, old man stumbled and dropped his small stack of books. "Jumping poetry! I hate it when poetry jumps," he declared.

Shorty shook his head, didn't quite know what to make of the remark, as if the author of it did, then proceeded to nap row. He did not realize that on the way, he passed through the sad Polish poets section.

When he arrived at nap row, he was surprised to find Emily with a lap full of books but sound asleep. She's spoken a sermon that morning, worked late into the night in preparation and laundry.

Laundry was by now second nature to Emily. Where she lived with

the Mother of Many, her room was small but nicely although inexpensively furnished; pink and dark blue and light blue were the color themes, except for her floor to ceiling bookshelf, stuffed with books of all colors.

Her roommate was a foster mom of three (sometimes more), natural mom of one. These five made do with the living room, one master bedroom (for the children) and a smaller bedroom. Emily was in charge of the "men's program" consisting of one or two handfuls living in a dorm type building on the grounds. She spoke twice a week, tried to keep the lid on this part of the mission, while also working as near-to-full-time chaplain at the jail.

She also helped the foster part of the foster situation. The laundry cycle seemed never ending, and it often fell on Emily. At the small laundry section of the mission grounds, Emily spent many an hour, watching and reading. Teach as you may, thefts occur in laundry rooms everywhere, including those at the mission. As some cannot sleep without ocean sounds or whatever, Emily joked that she had trouble sleeping when there's not the sound of laundry churning. On that topic, Emily, well, exaggerated. Emily could sleep anywhere.

In return for her labors, she got room, board, something from the mission, not much, and something from her denomination for the work at the jail. It was an adequate but small living earned at the expense of endless hours. Bob Hope reportedly could fall asleep at the slightest suggestion, in a cab or plane or wherever his travels took him. Sister Emily "entertained" fewer troops, and her world away from the mission consisted almost exclusively of the miles between museums near downtown LA, downtown and its jail, the museums to be found in nearby Pasadena, LACMA and the mid-Wilshire area between it and downtown. Mid-Wilshire runs a small stretch about half way between downtown and Beverly Hills. This was her small world, although she began to get around a little more after she met Shorty. She traveled almost none at all, but she slept better than Bob Hope and worked just as hard. Shorty's small world consisted of little more than downtown and the 10 miles out Interstate 5 to the nearest casino, unless there was a Ralph Meeker movie playing. He would go all over town to see a Ralph Meeker movie, particularly the Ralph Meeker as Mike Hammer movie.

The mission was, shall we say, informal. On one occasion where one of her "sonnies" was to leave the grounds to go home to family - that was the goal, off the grounds and home to family - she'd had to sort laundry from the pulpit. One of the elderly ladies who lived on the grounds, a retired missionary, brought a basket of laundry to the pulpit for Emily's inspection. "Leave that, wash that, he'll need that," and on went the laundry business in between the offertory and sermon.

The matter of a woman's sleeping habits was a mystery to Shorty. He thought whether he ought to consider it rude but decided to not ponder the small point. He took the chair next to her and began to browse through the life of Corot.

Within the hour, Emily awoke, apologized and suggested they leave. The check-out lady would not allow Shorty three of the Corot books without a trip back up the escalator for special permission to take out reference books. At the LA Central library, certain books out on the stacks are for reference but you cannot reference them at home, at least, not without special permission. Shorty did not want to wrestle the books up the escalator and was in fact relieved to be down to a manageable four books.

"I'm sorry but I am just too tired to get into it today, and anyway, you have found your books, and best you get a chance to read before we chat. Up to you, but if you'd like to chat, I live not far from downtown, and know every comfortable reading place between Pasadena and LACMA. If you'd like, we could meet at the Bonaventure hotel. It is so big, you can get lost, and no one bothers you. The aesthetics are not as good as the oh-so-nice one on Figueroa but that is too small to partake of their lobby without notice. I live at a mission, and try to get out to some little nicer surroundings for quiet times when I can. I know many little nooks and crannies of nice places to read and chat in the city. If you'd like to talk about Corot and art, call and we'll arrange to meet, perhaps next Saturday."

Shorty took her card. "Emily Jennifer Ebury, Chaplain, Missionary" was all it said with a single phone number.

"I don't have a private phone. It will ring at the mission office. They'll come get me. I have an office at the jail but I don't always give out that number."

"Okay," said Shorty. "And thanks."

Chapter 4

Shorty owned a no-bedroom condominium in Bunker Hill, a bottom-of-the-line offering on the 12th floor of a swank building. Shorty sometimes mocked the tenants, under his breath, with "hoop-de-doo." It was a prestigious building with mostly white-collar working people, but some hoop-de-dooos that drew out Shorty's tendency to mock those that even hint of being snooty. Shorty was a prime candidate for country and western music - the kind that says, "I drink beer and I'm ok, and you drink wine and nuts to you." But for reasons unknown, even to me, Shorty didn't like country music. In fact, he almost never listened to music, even simple, popular songs.

The pool area was large and nearly deserted in the weekends. Most of the people that lived there made enough money to get away to their real homes on weekends. Many of the people who really lived there were young professionals just starting out on a fairly generous pay scale. And there were odds and ends, like Shorty, who was one of the few who worked for the city that could afford the rent, or were willing to live in such tight quarters. An exception was the Judge and his wife who lived down the hall, neither of whom'd ever said more than a handful of "hello's" to Shorty.

No valet parking but tall and prestigious and plenty of security. He'd gotten his tiny apartment in a downturn of the real estate market for \$60,000. He didn't owe alimony like so many of his friends for he'd never been married. He anticipated a small inheritance if his mother ever passed (his father'd left long before), and thought that might eventually be enough to pay for the condo. He was able to get a loan and planned to pay it off as slowly as possible. The dues were \$245 a month, and that was doable if the loan was spread out over a maximum. Doc, his golfing friend, had told him his first marriage had cost him a thousand a month, balance sheet to balance sheet; wedding day to D day (divorce day) was \$25,000 down for 25 months, and his second was worse, although his third was financially healthy and mostly pleasant. Such stories were all around and fearful to Shorty, who'd worked steady and was able to put small down and still get a loan.

One reason Shorty liked his condo at Bunker Hill was that they were building the concert hall beneath and it was coming up to him. Not that Shorty was one for concerts, at least not until he met Emily.

There would be a time when Emily took Shorty to a mostly classical Christmas concert at a Gothic style, beautiful church on La Conte near UCLA, in which a guy from the front row got up two minutes into the first Bach and walked out on the young lady

organist. "How'd you like the concert?," Emily asked later. Shorty had to admit that his thoughts turned to "Mike Hammer would have decked him, if that'd been Mike Hammer's girl playing."

It was oh so quiet before the concert, and the light streaming through the stained glass window pains was oh so beautiful as it made its way through the series of twelve colors of stains that varied from window to window. As the silence was broken amidst the oh so nicely dressed music goes with the softest of Bach, and despite the Christmas season and all the good cheer that is supposed to spread, Shorty had to admit that his thoughts ran to: "Wouldn't it be something if someone decked that guy as he got up and walked out, right there in the aisle, right there in church, right next to all those professors' houses, wouldn't that be something? If that was Mike Hammer's woman at the organ, that's what he'd do. What if some little old lady had been conned by this guy getting up from the front row, and she stepped out in the aisle and just belted him one, right there in front of everyone, wouldn't that be something?" Such was Shorty's thought life even around churches and concert halls, which he admitted to Emily at a later date, along with "I have a somewhat irrational fear of slow oboe music."

Nevertheless, Shorty instantly took to the idea of looking down on a concert hall. He could look down on it even after it was built and he liked that. He'd looked at a cheap condo in a nice building near the Sunset Strip but it was ground floor; maids' quarters was the builder's original idea and that was what they were used for back when maids lived in rather than commuted. But it felt like the weight of all the wealthy rested on this little condo; there were even stilt like buttresses in the back to seemingly hold the whole thing up. Shorty wanted to be up. Earthquakes may quake more but the burglars have farther to travel. He wanted to be upstairs. He wanted to be higher.

He'd brought into the condo a sofa bed, recliner, one small table, small tv, lamp, and had since added one nice oil painting, yellow, rather French-looking, a close-out at a sale at the Pacific Design Center. That and a lot of paper back mysteries, and clothes. There was one bookshelf, or rather two small ones stacked on top of each other, and a number of boxes of paperbacks that exceeded closet space.

He kept the living part of the apartment rather nice, or rather Angel did. This was something of a refuge. "Efficiency" means no bedroom. There was a small bar that separated the efficiency living area from the small kitchen, and around from the kitchen was a small hall with clothes closets which led to the bath. The small hall was usually a mess except for the day of and the day after Angel came to clean. The kitchen was generally kept up, albeit there was one problem - the half refrigerator which

frosted up in exactly something less than the two weeks between Angel's visits.

The furnishings were few, interior decorators none, guests almost unheard of. The biweekly visits of Angel were the only disruptions, and they were most welcome. The visits cost \$50 every two weeks. Angel and golf were just about Shorty's only luxuries. Recurring gambling losses exceeded the cost of either but gambling was not considered a luxury because for years it had not been considered discretionary. But he never gambled away his house payment or condo dues, and only on one occasion did he have to give up golf for a while. There was no budget for a new car or big repair bills, and Shorty worried much about his old car.

He'd angled his recliner to see over to the corner where the tv abode, or to look out into the expanse of his city view going east. It wasn't the downtown per se view; more the blue-collar part of downtown, or commuters commuting toward the cheaper smoggy area of San Gabriel valley. The view was non-pool but one he liked very much, up high enough to see but not get lost in the clouds. The east wall was glass above the knee (thigh-high if Shorty is your measuring stick). The recliner looking out over the east wall of glass, angling a bit toward the tv, this was Shorty's usual spot, and this Sunday night was usual in that sense.

This Sunday night was usual in the sense that there was no rain or storm. A sense of well being arises as one sits around a fireplace on a night of a storm. The contrast of the storm and the light of the fire draws one more and more to satisfaction in the provision of the hearth. There was no fireplace, but it was one of Shorty's pleasures to watch a storm through the glass of his fairly high-up condo. The contrast of the outside and the inside was most assuring and a great pleasure but that was not on the program for this still night.

Another one of Shorty's few pleasures was to stay home on a hot afternoon with the air on high and watch golf. Fans are useful on a hot day to stir the breeze. Yet the work involved makes one warmer, countering the cool of the breeze. There are tradeoffs in the work of men, in the self-efforts of man setting out to do things needful and appropriate. Shorty truly enjoyed reclining in his recliner with the air conditioner on, watching the frustrations and victories and perspiration of others.

He ate deli from the mart downstairs, and tried to read his Corot books but fell asleep instead. He awoke at that inconvenient time when it is almost too late to roll out the sofa bed but it's going to hurt a bit in the back if you spend all night in the recliner, which he did. He was up an hour too early, tried to read but couldn't. Finally, it was time to go to work.

When Shorty shaved, he had a small stool that lifted him up to a little above mid-mirror. His five feet were tall enough to make do, but he didn't like being in the bottom quartile of the mirror and opted for the stool's help to remedy that small problem. He liked hitting the mirror in the middle like everybody else and preferred being a little above mid-mirror.

He put on his suit, straddling the clutter of dirty clothes in the small hall, and got ready to go, beret and attache case. The beret would go to the attache case just before the office. He carried the attache case every night and it usually had something but rarely had files. He'd figured on a coffee-only breakfast from the mart, but decided a jolt of juice would be nice. As he tried to open the refrigerator door, he found it frozen shut. He pulled and pulled, negotiated in word and deed (kicks) with his nonverbal, frozen opponent. Finally getting the door open, he retrieved his juice. As he returned to the bath, he kicked the loose dirty clothes, and complained and kicked again. He threw a small fit, as per his stature. As he left, he took the scotch tape that he kept on top of the refrigerator and taped the refrigerator door shut. "Thank God, Angel will be in today."

Shorty walked to his office three blocks from city hall. He passed two men pondering a sight he'd been watching for some weeks, a large enclosed scoop chute going from the open back of a truck into the third floor of a building.

"I think it is asbestos removal," speculated one downtown worker in uniform.

Emily had interjected herself into his puzzlement at the German Expression at LACMA and uninvited, Shorty interjected himself into this conversation of two strangers. "Either that, or they're very, very, very slow burglars." Puzzlement rather than smiles came from the strangers. Shorty paused only momentarily to make his point. He'd thought of the point the first time he'd seen the scoop chute and it gave a lift to this Monday to have it provide an opportunity to vent his somewhat pessimistic humor.

As he approached the entry to the old office building the city had rented for temporary (as in permanent) quarters, Shorty recognized someone not from any picture but the description in the man's file.

As he approached, he muttered, "Does pride or hate or something spreading out as it goes cause such size, like extra passengers need a stretch-limo?" Some ponder the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone but Shorty pondered the carvings of wind and time on other natural phenomenon. "Would something combustible spill out of the man and onto the sidewalk, like lighter fluid from a lighter, had his bulk not spread out to accommodate whatever it

was inside pushing out?"

Shorty continued to mutter to himself, "When he belches, do his teeth rattle? Is there not an echo somewhere in there? Where does a belch go when your mouth is shut?"

Shorty had peculiar interests and the most surprising topics would come up in his conversations, particularly in his under-the-breath mutterings which this semi-recluse thought no one ever heard. His golfing friends didn't think anything about it because everyone talks to the air on the golf course. Often times, what one sees on the golf course just can't wait for comment.

"Now if I grew a beard, the whiskers ought to weigh the same. On a little guy like me, whiskers ought to weigh the same. This guy's whiskers might weigh a little more because he's got a little more face but not that much more. When a little guy grows a long beard, I wonder if the whisker-to-carrier-weight ratio ever makes 'em stoop over? Who could I ask?"

But Shorty's many questions on many topics he mostly kept to himself.

He approached the large man. "I think you're looking for me."

"Who are you, little guy?"

"I'm your parole officer. "

"Oh. "

"You Ox?"

"Yea. "

"I'm Shorty. Let's go up."

"Ok. "

As they ventured up the elevators, Shorty showed off a bit. He never did it in his condo elevator, unless he was alone, but he often did it to his cases.

"Look at this, show you something." He looked at the elevator buttons then turned his back to them. "What floor do you want to go to?"

"Our floor?"

"No, you'd say that's too easy."

"Pick another floor, not the fourth floor."

"Eighth floor."

Over his back, never looking, Shorty shot his knuckle as a dart into the eighth floor button.

"Interesting," said Ox. "Ok."

"Well, swimmers got swimming pools, basketball players got courts, I've got elevator buttons. It's just that its not recognized officially as a sport."

"Does it work with darts, darts behind your back?"

"Doesn't work with darts."

"You could be in the elevator man olympics," said Ox.

"It loses something, the way you put it."

"Sorry."

"A company man without a company, I heard a guy say who got laid off. I've always been a sportsman without an event, counting golf as an aggravation, such is life."

"We've all got our problems, else, what am I doing here?"

"I'm a little guy lookin' for a niche."

"What's a niche?"

"A place to be."

"I'm a little guy lookin' for a niche, and it ought not to be hard for me to find, not like you, you'd take up so much."

"We've all got our problems," said Ox.

"Now I've got you. Are you going to be a problem, Ox?"

"No way."

And so started a typical work day for Shorty.

He walked home from the office, drove half hour out the Interstate 5 to the nearest casino, and played cards till ten. It was a typical Monday. He came home and read from eleven to twelve.

He browsed one of his Corot books and fell upon a story of how

the artist liked to paint exactly what he saw. If he painted a model with a book, he needed a book that was just the right color. Corot traveled three times from his native France to Italy. The story that captured his imagination was that of Corot looking for a book of a particular color.

Shorty imagined Corot in an Italian book store, and as Shorty sat back in his recliner, he doodled the following notes.

Shorty as Corot: "I'm looking for a book. A blue book."

Shorty as Bookman: "An author named...."

Corot: "No, I mean a book that is blue. I need it for my work."

Bookman: "I do not understand."

Corot: "I'll just look around. I also need an orange book, and a yellow book, although it is hard to find the yellow I need here in Italy, even if I can find the right book. And I need a green book. And I'll try..."

In Shorty's doodles, Corot bought a book on birds, and architecture, and Indian poetry, and accounting, and the anatomy of the eye, all the colors he needed, to the wonderment of the confused bookseller.

Shorty smiled and then thought he'd fought sleep long enough to lay out the sofa bed.

Chapter 5

Tuesday was supposed to be a typical work day. This day he drove because he would go from the office to look for a case in Boyle Heights.

He parallel parked the car which tilted toward the curb near a pay phone on Soto. He had left the keys on the seat, stepped out looking for the note with the phone number he needed. As he searched, the door slowly swung shut. He tugged as he belt with both hands but was going nowhere. He side-footed kicked the car on the left side just behind the door. He thought the better of his technique and sole-foot kicked it again, where he'd kicked it many times before. There was only the one door to a side, and was not so angry to kick it where it would have to be repaired. He kicked it where it resisted the most, gave in the least.

He realized he had no change, and finally begged phone change to call the auto club to come and get him into his car. Having so little wherewithal, although he did wear an ankle holster, He felt unsafe and embarrassed. He'd twice been the recipient of rather extraordinary kindnesses from Latinos, both occasions having to do with car trouble. This third kindness was from a Latino, but had more to do with the 30 cents needed for a call to get the Auto Club to break into the car. But however you categorize the problem, the 30 cents was forthcoming from a taco vendor on wheels, and the Auto Club did respond to the 30 cent call and get Shorty mobile again.

So went the Terrible Tues. He got little work done. He had to explain to his boss why he got so little done and did so in a fashion that had very little to do with the day as I saw it.

He decided against a trip to the casino, judging from the way the day had gone so far. He joked with his golf friends, "If a day goes by that I don't have three beers, my stomach calls up and asks if I'm sick or something." This night, he stayed home and drank six beers.

He re-read a newspaper account of the time he'd rescued a kid being beaten up by a gang. He was driving away from downtown on Temple, and when he saw the sight, he just turned into the trouble then stopped cross-wise in the middle of the street. He flashed the lights on and off, honked several times, then drove fast for the little distance before he came to screeching halt up on the sidewalk. He never got out of the car until the trouble was gone. There was a small picture of the kid and Shorty, but no picture of Shorty's little car that had done most of the work. There was a time at work where he broke up a fight that broke out over the xerox machine, but that didn't make the paper.

He dropped out mid-movie and read most of the night.

Corot was born in 1796, at roughly the first French Republic. The French Revolution gave way Emperor Napoleon, who himself gave way. Corot's life generally is a time of great turmoil and political upheaval in France. In the revolution of 1830, a particular Charles X was giving way to Louis Philippe. During the riots in Paris, Corot packed up his painting kit and walked out of the troubles, going to Chartres where he painted a famous painting of its cathedral. This was the story Shorty read that night, and it reminded him of how he came to live downtown.

Chapter 6

During the LA riots of 1992, Shorty lived three blocks from the famous Ambassador Hotel. In its better days, it had hosted the Academy Awards. In its most infamous day, it hosted the assassination of Bobby Kennedy. It eventually closed and turned out Wayne the Bellman, whom Shorty called Wayne the Philosopher because he always had reasons not to get off the street. Wayne had not worked and hardly bathed since the Ambassador closed.

It had beautiful grounds, which were open for wandering of guests and mid-Wilshire residents. Then the famous Ambassador closed its doors. It had been closed and put to disuse for some time before the riots.

The riots began east of Wilshire, near the Normandy cross street, and at their height had spread to the richer (if middle-class) side of mid-Wilshire. We use "at their height" in the sense of how they affected Shorty.

During the worst of it, Shorty stood on the roof, looking over the balustrades, to see looters at the door and arson fires in all directions. The convenience store at the corner was fire bombed by the residents of the apartment building across from Shorty's. Perhaps this was for the sin of selling tasteless sandwiches. In any event, Shorty's building was threatened with a similar fate by deliberate act if its residents identified the arsonist-neighbors across the street.

The looters left without coming into Shorty's building, and the fire department put out the arson fires. And while Shorty stood guard some time against the arsonists across the street making good of their threat against his building, the watch didn't last long.

Yet Shorty stayed on for some time, till someone slashed his tires. Then he decided to move downtown to Bunker Hill.

There was one incident of a lighter nature that lifted some of the worry and burden of those tiresome days. It began when a young father was stuck in the elevator on the fourth floor, the top floor of the apartment where there were three small apartments. The apartment building had begun as a combination of apartments on the lower floors, and hotel rooms on the two upper floors. Shorty's apartment was actually an old, small hotel room. The nicer trappings had fallen to disrepair, including the "glass" elevator. As one looked out toward the street from the fourth floor, one looked past the chandelier to solid glass, which had been chipped from the gun shots that had sprayed there some two years before. The police reported the chips could have been caused by as much as 22 bullets from the apartment across

the street, or BB shots from kids. The elevator door was dirty brown, but as you approached the side of the elevator from the side, one could see into the glassed area. Shorty's neighbor had been the first to respond to the alarm bell and had looked in to see the father and his two charges. As his tall neighbor, a copy shop worker named Leon, turned from looking into the back of the elevator, he was in such concentration that he walked right into the chandelier, causing quite a crash of sorts and sounds even though the chandelier held its place.

"How delightful," Shorty said, grinning at Leon's problems, as he went down the stairwell to get the manager. Shorty figured that he didn't really need to belong to a gym because the elevators rarely worked before or after this incident.

Things didn't seem to change much in LA due to the riots. And according to the book Shorty was reading, things didn't seem to change much in France due to the Paris riots of 1830. Things didn't change because the people didn't change.

There was something amusing and delightful to Shorty of the thought of Corot walking out of the riots to go to the next town and paint a church. It seemed quite serious business but amused him no end, visibly so, and amusement was not often visible on Shorty.

Doc had suggested to Shorty that he keep a diary and he did for a time. It was a rare night of thunder of lightning that Tuesday evening Shorty sat in his recliner, dusted off his diary and wrote of his feelings of the LA riots.

Chapter 7

Out of "tall dark and handsome," Shorty had not tall nor handsome, and only a little of the dark from sitting around the nearly deserted pool during weekends. His nose was not red like a hard drinker's might be, nor spread out like a boxer's might be. Shorty never was one to box, but his short nose was a little puffy, a little up and out rather than down, a bit like a radish with the end nipped off and nostrils dug out. His puffy, unimpressive little nose was affixed between two puffy, saddlebag cheeks that tended toward red with the slightest provocation. He was one to dress well, and rarely was out in disarray. But he was not one to spend much on haircuts.

That Wednesday, he opted to go to his favorite and only barber, since talkative Victoria moved back to Belize. Spanish Victoria only charged \$7 to trim away the curly outer growth. His now Korean barber charged \$10 plus tip, and their conversation was limited to "medium haircut." Delilah clipped Samson's locks and asked after his secrets, but here, the language barrier between the two men of widely disparate years brought silence and nods. No secrets passed. If the confusion of languages in Genesis did prevent cooperation in the building of edifices that reach to the sky, it did not totally prevent cooperation in the simple matter of putting clippers in hand and setting them to the task of preventing the growth and spread of the reddish locks that abode atop Shorty's radish nose and saddlebag cheeks.

Even "medium haircut" was not understood by the proprietor of hair splitting whose shop was on 8th street in the heart of Little Korea. This is some two blocks to the south of Wilshire, the area of Wilshire known as Mid-Wilshire, a section whose tall buildings one would never guess could cast a shadow on affairs so Oriental. But if "medium haircut" was not understood and those particular words got lost amidst the hundreds of Korean words that flowed from the radio and the impatient hair-heavy men awaiting a turn, the haircut matter somehow got agreed to and the work got done.

With the help of the Korean CPA who worked in the same neighborhood, the Korean barber paid a license tax to the city to pay Shorty to look after parolees, and he brought part of the money back to pay the barber to trim his hair. When it was all said and done, even if it was not understood, there was some left over to pay the young student who swept up, admixing Shorty's missing hairs in with hairs Korean, tossing the unlikely lot of hairs into a dumpster, which was then picked up by a black trucker from Long Beach, who got his hair cut back in his own neighborhood. Etc. Blessings multiplied in ways not easily discernable in the middle of much confusion. The Lord's minus, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, subtracting that which does not

work. It was a day of countless such things, so mechanical and mundane, boring, yet human and particularized. One would not trust a mechanized barber with hairs so delicate, or trust their picking up to a truck of many tons unless it was to be driven through school zones by one crafted for the task.

Is the story of economics not the story of the Lord's ways? Is it not the story of the Lord's blessings, his delicate creativity and craftsmanship, his lessons, such as you must be helpful? Did He not promise to make Abraham a blessing, a blessing that lasts? Did He not promise that the prosperity of the wicked is temporary?

Does the story of economics not demonstrate that Jesus is alive, that people are people, and death is bad? How the former? Do the fishes not multiply still, quickly and slowly, in baskets and streams? How the latter? People work to make a living, do they not? "How do you make your dying?," makes no sense at all. As the Korean barber cuts the hair of his customer, does he not choose life, at least a little bit, at least for a short time?

After the haircut, Shorty went to visit Wayne, who had for years staked out a busy corner along 6th, not three blocks from his old employer, the Ambassador, and some three blocks east of Shorty's old apartment.

Wayne the Philosopher was some 40 years, quite a bit older than Shorty as young mortals measure such things, but they shared many topics of common interest. Their most common topic was their common pessimism. They had talked many hours over the years, mostly on Wayne's street corner, once at a donut shop down the way on third.

Shorty had some success finding places to take him to clean up, and had on one occasion even a cheap motel for the use of the bath for a make over of Wayne the Philosopher. Wayne's showers or baths were usually many months between dippings. When they'd known each other early on, when Wayne was first on the street, Shorty had talked Wayne into trips to missions and programs designed for such situations. But Wayne had turned against such places for reasons that Wayne explained in detail but which only he understood.

One dusk, there blurted out of Shorty's mouth an invitation to shower up at his old apartment. Like an umpire making a bad call that everybody sees, after its out there, there is almost no taking it back.

Shorty sneaked dirty Wayne the Philosopher up the stairs to his fourth floor apartment, left him with a plastic gunny sack for left overs, new (thrift store) trousers, shirt, tennis shoes, tooth paste, soap and an hour to get the job done.

Shorty trusted Wayne, and had never known him to be irresponsible. When he'd paid an hour's time at the cheap motel, he came in to find still dirty Wayne smiling in his new clothes with his dirty clothes neatly stacked on a pile of newspapers allotted to that purpose. Even the motel manager was reasonably happy, but "Don't come back" was the conclusion of the matter.

When Shorty came back up to his little "efficiency" rented apartment in mid-Wilshire, he opened the door, looked straight ahead and saw apartment. He turned to the left and saw apartment. He swung open the bathroom door, and coal mine. Yet it seemed somehow to not have gotten much off of Wayne, despite the plain message that all that was dirty of Wayne seemed to have worn off onto the linoleum and other exposed parts of Shorty's bath.

It was the last time. Angel still cleaned for him but she didn't talk to him for a while after the visit of dirty Wayne the Philosopher.

And having Wayne in one's car turned out to be even more unworkable.

Shorty did not know what to do with Wayne the Philosopher, but he genuinely liked him, and liked to see to his needs from time to time.

As Shorty drove up to Wayne's seemingly marked off by scent little area on 6th, he was encouraged that he didn't dance. It was not good to see Wayne dance.

"How you doing, Wayne?"

"Ok."

"Good to see you."

"You me too, got a five."

"Got a couple of bucks."

"Thanks."

"I miss our talks, Wayne, since I moved, it's been a long time since we had a talk."

"I know."

If you carried around "foolishness" in a bucket, you could be carrying around all kinds of things. On one of his visits, Shorty and Wayne discussed why some plural-type words are singular. They decided that "foolishnesses" was more accurate if the topic

was many forms of foolishness, and that LA in particular could use the plural, and that if some objected that it didn't sound right, they could explain that it is a question of taste, a question of regional usage. But on this day, the topic turned to one that came up about every other visit.

"Wayne, when are you going to go over to that shelter, they've got showers and some clothes. Let 'em help you."

"I've got other plans."

"Did you ever call your brother, and see if he'd help."

"No, decided against that."

"Wayne, you've got to do something."

"Thanks, Shorty. Seen any Ralph Meeker movies lately?"

"No, nobody was Mike Hammer like Ralph Meeker, nobody tougher - throw 'em up against the wall, stomp on 'em, but he wimped out a little bit in that Kirk Douglas movie."

"Firing squad problem, I recall you said," said Wayne.

"Yea, firing squad. If you're in the French army and on the wrong end of a firing squad, kind of hard to throw 'em up against the wall and stomp on 'em. He wimped out a while but then got his composure back."

"Is dying well such a big accomplishment?" asked Wayne.

"It makes for a better movie may be all, death as entertainment kind of thing. Been reading a little art, and watching a few of Turner's Jurassic movies on cable and a few nature documentaries."

"Nature programs would be Ok if they'd just dish 'em out and not try to dramatize them, or explain what they don't understand. Back when I had an apartment, I saw a documentary on bird travel and they were trying to figure out how the birds went and how they got there. They had about five minutes of good stuff and tried to make it into a whole show by dramatizing that the graduate student's children were going to starve if the bird droppings didn't prove they came from Madagascar or somewhere. I'd rather watch Bud and Lou. I always liked Lou Costello and his problems. Bud and Lou could of made two shows out of those birds on their way to wherever."

"I used to slip out of work a little early to get home in time to watch Bud and Lou," said Shorty.

"I think they left it a cliffhanger, tune in next week, kind of thing, but I didn't. I didn't particularly care whether this guy's kids end up on welfare because he can't figure out where the birds are headed. They don't know how the birds get where they're going."

"Anything happening in the old neighborhood?"

"I saw a big truck trying to make the corner, and it caught the light pole, the light metal kind, like over there, it was down a few blocks. But it caught it, and just keep going, but so slow. Very slow, but the pole just came out like it was a toothpick. Knocked it flat, but he didn't back up an inch. Just kept on, but he wouldn't just gun it and knock it down. He just inched forward, took the truck driver a couple of minutes just inching along to knock down the pole."

"Next time, Wayne. Here, brought you a little toothbrush."

"Ok, Shorty."

Their conversations had gotten shorter and shorter. "There was a time when Wayne could have sold you a mainframe computer," Shorty had once told a stranger at a lunch counter.

Whatever strings Wayne once pulled up to explain things seemed not there anymore, or at least the strings one might rely upon to pull up some sensible things to do that matched the situation seemed not to work anymore. "If I could only get Angel in to dust off and straighten out those closets," muttered Shorty.

Shorty went to the casino to eat and throw dice, hoping, no doubt, that a good deed, a little toothpaste and a few dollars, would cause the dice to hop his way. But the dice didn't know anything about Wayne the Philosopher or Shorty's good deed. The dice hoped their own way in complete disregard to the tooth paste that Wayne had tossed away. Shorty lost a little, and went home early to read of Corot.

Shorty also placed sport bets for people from the office and sundry others for a ten percent service or bookie fee. He went to the casino nearly everyday. This was illegal but modestly lucrative, although it usually didn't cover his losses.

In the elevator, he ran into the Judge who lived down the hall. The Judge was in his sixties, hard and slow in discourse, but this night he was so delighted with something he'd read that he couldn't help but share his delight as they walked in the hall.

"I've been reading something by Seneca..."

"Who was?"

"Stoic philosopher, advisor to Nero, eventually forced to commit suicide."

"Ouch."

"The Stoics were the frown-and-bear-it philosophy club," said the Judge.

"Or the grin-and-be-indifferent-to-it philosophy club," said Shorty.

"Or the golden mean between the frown-and-grin..."

"But bear-up...", interjected Shorty.

"The frown-mostly, grin-sometimes, always-bear-up philosophy club, yes, that might describe the Stoics," said the Judge.

"My doctor told me I ought to read the Stoics, so I have some, but I never heard of the one you mentioned."

"Seneca tells of a Judge Piso, who sentenced a man to die for killing someone, but then the centurion assigned to the prisoner let him try to prove his innocence, and in fact, the person who was supposed to have been killed showed up. He'd not even been killed."

"Sounds like a premise for a movie."

"The judge sentenced the centurion to death for not swiftly executing his orders to execute the prisoner. The man who'd been sentenced to death, he went ahead and had him executed because he'd been sentenced to die and the judge wasn't going to reverse his sentence. The guy who hadn't been murdered, the judge sentenced him to death for causing the death of the other two."

"Ouch. That's one tough judge."

"That's my kind of judge," said the Judge, smiling. "Evening."

"Good night. Say, Judge."

"What?"

"Did it every occur to you, I work for the county, but you work for the state, and you really work for a bookie. I mean really, the lottery is just a bookie operation, historically illegal, reserved to the Mafia. Even if it is technically separate, the lottery is the state. California doesn't break knee caps like the Mafia, because they don't give credit and don't have to, at least not yet, but basically they've just taken over by giving themselves a monopoly on what is traditionally done by gangsters."

But did it ever occur to you when you're sentencing someone that you're doing it in the name of a bookie - did that ever occur to you?"

"No, good night," the Judge said abruptly.

"Well, hoop do doo to you too, Judge," Shorty said out of the judge's hearing.

That night, he read that Corot's favorite book was My Imitation of Christ by 'a Kempis, which Shorty had heard of from his barely Catholic upbringing, but that he also read the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, and that Corot renounced marriage for his painting. Shorty had once heard a Jesuit explain the doctrine of celibacy for priests on the lines of an in-the-trenches, mobility in the spiritual military kind of need. He read of Corot's constant but short-tethered travels (except for three trips to Italy), and wondered if he was "a priest of landscape painting." He also read of Corot's kindness, and that he was called "the St Vincent de Paul of painting."

Shorty doodled, "That must have something to do with Corot's good deeds but I can't recall who was this St. Vincent de Paul. I wonder what they bet on in Corot's day. This doesn't say. I wonder if Wayne the Philosopher can tell me about Epictetus, or Doc can."

Shorty slept the night in the recliner, and awoke to a back ache, a slight hangover, and a taped-up refrigerator.

Chapter 8

That Thursday, I am told the following of Sister Emily's work day.

She arrived at her shared office at the jail to a desk of letters and notes. She went to make a tour of one of the rows of cells and found a new, young guard, reading Sartre. The guard looked up at her but was not the talkative type.

"Are you the docent in the Museum of Unforgiveness, my guide today on the tour of misery and woe?...I've not read a lot of Sartre and existentialist philosophy, but believe it to exalt the "existentialist hero," who says he is god, or as much of a god as one is going to find. The Scripture says the greatest of all will be servant of all. Jesus is the head of that line because He served as none other could. And the 'existentialist hero' is precisely the contrary, the adult brat who takes from all..."

The guard was attentive but absolutely expressionless as he chewed his gum. She continued.

"If man were god, he'd speak to the wall and it would obey him, but these walls don't listen. The walls listen to a higher authority, even if it is only the authority of brick and mortar. If man were god, you would expect to find equality in the godhead, and if there is equality in the godhead, you're going to have to either open up all the cells or get in one yourself. Actually, you're already in one but can still get out come 5 o'clock. So which is it, are you going to open up all the cells and let the captives go free, do you have such power, or are you going to get into one of the after-hours, full-time cells yourself?"

"You must be Chaplain Emily."

"You got it, let me in, I've got to talk to some of the prisoners."

"You don't really want me to let 'em all out. If you were in charge, would you let 'em all out?"

"Well, not right away. Many of these people are harmful and you have to deal with that as a given. Psalm 10 says, "To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress." The persecution of man is only for a season. Part of God's blessing is to separate you from your enemies, and some of these are my enemy even though I mean them no harm. Now that is bad, when you hurt someone as harmless as me - don't you agree?"

There was no answer but a smile. "For now, just let me in. The Lord did not redeem the kingdom of darkness but calls us out one by one. The shelf in the library of truth for biographies of harmless souls is empty, except for the story of the Son who fulfilled all righteousness. I have drunk deep of God's well of forgiveness and I would not dole out in measure."

The guard opened the entryway door to the row of locked cells. Emily made appointments and tended to such things as reading glasses and stamps. To Emily's surprise, when she began this work, the most requested things were writing paper, reading glasses, and stamps. When she distributed such things, as is the chaplain's job, she talked of "spiritual eyes" and grace as postage paid. What is the "postage to heaven?," she would ask. God's angels may deliver you as a package to heaven when you die, but "What is the postage to heaven?"

As she disembarked the row of cells, Emily asked the guard. "If you're a philosopher, tell me, if you were a prisoner and were getting out at a particular time, would you want to be transferred to the east coast just to get out three hours earlier due to the change in time zones?"

"It depends. If I lived in LA, I'd have to spend days riding back on the bus."

"Is three days on a bus as a free man a price in time and money worth paying just to get out of jail three hours earlier?"

"They'd probably leave you in jail three months longer trying to figure out if the law allows them to let you out three hours earlier due to the time change."

"You're probably right. But think if Sartre has anything to add on these points." She handed him a New Testament, which he took. "Nice to meet you. We'll talk."

"Are you a movie buff?," she asked. He shrugged.

"Did you ever see the movie `Wings of Desire.' Its premise is that the angels look down and see we have it so good that they want to materialize and be human. For one thing, they transmit what they do not have, namely joy. They wander around the libraries and buildings and parks, and by touching a shoulder, they transmit what they do not have, namely joy. One angel gets talked into wanting to materialize and be human because he falls in love with the pretty red-head. It was black and white movie that shaded everything, but it was a red-head, trust me, a woman knows." (Sister Emily's hair was plain brown and usually up.) "The angel wants to materialize so he can drink coffee, smoke a cigarette, sleep with the red-head and wrestle with death. What rubbish. Peter Falk is a good actor, but what nonsense. It is

precisely a non-repentance kind of theme, teaching man that he can look forward to wrestling with death. Man sits in the kingdom of darkness, and this stupid movie tells him to pull down the shades. The Scriptures say that Jesus tasted death for every man. Every grave calls Satan a liar because he promised Eve if she pushed away from God, she wouldn't die. Jesus is alive, death is bad, people are people not gods, those are my big three."

"You turned a movie review into a sermon. You're pretty sneaky."

"I'm a chaplain, what can I say. It's what I do, but think about it. 'For the joy set before Him, Jesus suffered the cross,' the Scriptures say, and so don't let yourself settle for a touch from phoney-baloney, depressed, German existentialist bunko angels in trench coats."

"If I see the movie advertised, I won't go, Ok."

"Good. Technically, it was good, but bunk is bunk, even when its dressed up. Its a pretty good clue that its bunk if the angels wear trench coats. Come on. Read the first chapter of Ezekiel, the angels of the Lord don't wear trench coats. Another Scripture does say we can entertain angels unawares, and I suppose... "

"I won't go."

"Good."

"Hey, how far is it to heaven? I read in a book by a Princeton professor, Carl Sagan, his book said that they'd searched the heavens, found no planet heaven, and no God. You tell me, how far is it to heaven?"

"No distance at all. The distance to heaven is compassed in the turning of the key to your heart and your heart's confession of the Son. But you can't find it without reading the road signs. 'Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to life, and few there be that find it.' That's what the Lord said. And remember, don't get this wrong, life is good, death is bad. When the candles on the cake that is this life go out, you either become a cake not turned, a cake that will not bake, or a raised cake by his grace, raised to be with Him, but in any case, the nature of death is that it is bad. Resurrection life is a different topic, that's life. The phrase "dead on arrival" is a major problem. Dead on departure, alive on arrival - that you can live with, but still the nature of death is that it is bad. You have to read the signs or you wander around in the desert indefinitely."

"Road signs?"

"Seasons and signs. Road signs. Turn here, so far to there, 'Last services before Yuma,' 'Best pea soup in Southern California.' Who do you believe? Heed the signs. Turn in immediately to the last and only services before the desert, the desert of isolation from God. And of all the places to dine, would you be so inattentive to the signs as to miss the wedding feast of the lamb? I know how the Lord works, and I know that if you think back to the road signs He's planted in your life that you ignored, or detoured, you could remember them. You will remember them some day. The signs are everywhere. The Lord did not hide them. He put them in the broad way, the places easy to see. He did not hide them in outer space. The model prayer to the Father hallows His name and asks His will be done on earth, not on Jupiter, as it is in heaven. Jeremiah said that the wise man shouldn't glory in his wisdom or the mighty man in his strength, or the rich man in his riches, but let the one that glories glory in the fact that he knows God, and that the Lord works lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth, because He delights in those things."

She continued on the matter of signs and times. "The signs are well lighted. In Revelation, it says of the heavenly Jerusalem that it has no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is its light. Look for the light and the signs; the signs are well lighted. Nature declares His glory, the Scriptures say so and we can all see it. What about Isaiah? We shouldn't be surprised to see jails. One's overall impression from reading Isaiah is that in fact the Lord will turn over the tables when He doesn't find righteousness in the earth. Don't forget Isaiah, not to mention Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Lord's provided a highway, a narrow way, the Jacob's ladder way to heaven. The only way is the way, the truth and the life, the Son. Read the signs. Heed the signs. They are well lighted but the light will go out one day if unheeded."

"But what about Carl Sagan's point?"

"The Song of Songs..."

"Which is what?"

"It is a book in the Bible. In the Song of Songs, the Shulamite woman asked where to find the one she loves, where is her beloved. That's the question, that's the thing to do - seek the Person, and you're not any more going to find the Person of the Lord in outer space than you can find him here in jail."

"But can't you ask a question?"

"Sure, you can ask a question, but it's got to be a good question. Jesus was asked by what authority He did what He did. He asked them, 'The baptism of John, was it of man or of God?'

Jesus said He would answer if they would answer first. The ones who asked had already rejected the truth. They were too fearful to reply to Jesus, because they were afraid to say John's mission was of man, and their question didn't need to be asked if they believed in Jesus by the testimony of John. So Jesus did not answer their question. John preached Jesus, and the truth was rejected. If the truth is rejected, this will not be met by a series of arguments. He rejects the Father who rejects the One sent by the Father. Yet there is a time when the Lord will send you back to examine the revelation already received. We have to humble ourselves to the revelation as God gives the revelation. There were those who saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, then they went right out and plotted against Him. The heavens declare His glory, the Scriptures say, and there is revelation in abundance, redundancies all around. But if you've already rejected the truth, and they send you up in a tin can fire cracker, you're not likely to come back convinced of God because He put up neon signs in outer space saying `This way to heaven.' While the heavens declare the Lord's glory, you're never going to get there totally by sight. There is a role of faith that relates to wisdom, and it is the ability to trust in Him to tell us what is around the corner of our understanding. The Lord requires that you relate to him personally, and not just intellectually. "

She continued, "And oh..."

"There's more?"

"And if you think you followed the right sign, then after you get where you're going, when you leave, if you look down and you're not wearing a wedding garment, you were in the wrong place. Matthew Chapter 22."

Came two o'clock and she spoke to a small class of inmates, all male, multi-colored but tending toward color and tending toward young. She spoke from her notes. All sat around a table.

The Bible lesson today is titled "People are people."

"God is sovereign and He sovereignly decided to delegate individuality to man. God created man in his own image, but the image is smudged and smokey and shattered. You're responsible because you're people, but if you want to do better, you've got to repent and tap into God, that's the how of how you're supposed to exercise your responsibility. God has freedom, and if you want freedom, He'll give it to you, but you've got to come through His lawyer, Christ."

The class was as blank as the small blackboard.

She continued, "God is God, people are people."

"People are people, not God. God is God," said one from the far side.

"People have become so dumb, and some of the very, very, dumb may be in here with us today. Because they're people and fallen from God, people can be very very dumb. Not that anyone here is in that category but just in case, so we won't even presume that everyone here knows whether they people. So we'll do the shadow test. If you're so dumb that you can't look at a person's face and know they're people, then look at their shadow. Everybody's shadow has a different shape but looks like a shadow, a little dark because we don't fully show forth the light of the Lord."

Everyone in the class stood in the corner near the window, cast a people shadow to the pronouncement of Emily initially, then more and more of the class, that in fact each was one of a class known as people. On some days, but not this day, she even added the testimony of a helper whose job it was to concur in the people status of the casters of shadows.

"Now don't get confused with Plato's idea of... that's not...well, I don't think we have to worry about anyone here getting mixed up on that account. Now in prison, you can't always find a shadow because it is so dark anyway, but remember the shadow test. If someone would cast a shadow and it is a people shadow, we confirm they are people, and that's true regardless of little distractions like how much of this and that makes 'em a little different."

This was followed by having everyone taking a seat and taking a small piece of cotton that had been dabbed in olive oil. The cotton pieces were passed around on a tray. Each was asked to dab his eyes as a prayer went up that the Lord open the eyes to see others in a different light. The prayer was "Let him who has eyes to see, see," which was a prayer that the Lord anoint the eyes of those present.

"Now maybe you're ready to look at people as people and not just their shadow. Race as a place of justification in the human heart is a bondage, a rejection of the Lord's way of faith that works by love. It is a blindness. We ask the Lord to anoint our eyes that we see in our brother a blessing, even a blessing that may come our way. Can a man hope to justify himself before God by his shading or lack of it, to the rejection of faith and a neighbor? The Lord knit up the bones in the womb to make your neighbor, and it is a major discourtesy to the Artist of all the art worth seeing to go to Him and say you didn't get this color right or that color is a little too much."

"I hear tell," she continued, "that tourists to Buenos Aires go to an area famous for its multicolored buildings and homes. The people did not have can enough of one kind to make do a house and

made do with parts of many cans, thus a house or building of one color to the window, and another to the drain pipe, and another color to the left, and the right, and on and on. But not so with people; the mixing comes out one color (mostly), and never stripes, nor a brown arm and a yellow foot and so on, testifying to the provision of God and His artistic tastes, as unsearchable as they may be. The white's not black because the Lord made him white, not because God ran out of black paint. The yellow is not yellow because God ran into a sale on yellow paint. But each is the color his own because God ordained it so. God gave him it." She paused for to sigh only. "We tend to reject a neighbor to justify ourselves to ourselves. Start first with God - would you go to God and say in my whiteness is light, and in my brother's darkness is dark? Would you justify yourself to God by your shading to the rejection of faith and your neighbor? If not to God, not to yourself either. We have to get back to the people category because, and it is not complicated, people are people - God made 'em people."

"What about slavery?," came from across the table.

"Slavery. The traffic of slaves and the buying and selling of souls is the traffic of Babylon, not the heavenly Jerusalem. The book of Revelation says the traffic of souls is the traffic of Babylon. Paul pleaded that Philemon be received not as a servant but a brother, while calling himself a "prisoner of Jesus Christ, one with "fellowprisoners." We don't want any of the traffic of Babylon even in our thoughts toward others."

"Now next class, we talk about going from people to being God's people. Then we're going to go into the death is bad series, then into the Jesus is alive series, proofs of the resurrection, the testimony of the scrub woman, the historical proofs of the prophecies of Isaiah, the Scriptures about the coronation of the Son, the return of the Son in glory upon his return."

"The story of the resurrection, the glory for salvation accomplished, is so astounding that one must bask and bask in the reality of the Spirit for the story and the anointing to soak it. We're to have a singleness of heart, singleness of purpose, toward the single goal of unveiling the Son in our lives even today, which means less and less of us and more and more of Him and the one He makes us to be."

"Remember the big three: Jesus is alive, people are people, and" (the class joined in as by rote)... "death is bad," said they all.

"Class is dismissed."

The hatless jail mates were her charge but as she saw the cap of one of the guards on the way home, she offered to her own hearing: "Hat buying classes. I need to add some sermons of

practical, everyday details. Or I'll write the LA Unified School District and suggest hat buying classes."

When she arrived at the Mission, there was a note from her roommate that Shorty had called and wanted to meet Saturday at the Bonaventure at noon to discuss art. She returned his call to confirm, but asked that they meet instead at the place Wilshire disappears into the park that overlooks the ocean at Santa Monica. Plan B was to meet in the Bonaventure hotel near the gift shop if it rained. It does rain in southern California, particularly in the fall...but not a lot. Plan A was, if it doesn't rain, meet by the statue of Saint Monica where Wilshire disappears.

Chapter 9

Shorty's Friday was a light day. He'd met Ox's wife and kids at an old subsidized housing project on 8th near downtown. Parolees were easy to find and the day had gone well.

He visited his storage unit on Normandie to get an old pair of golf shoes. His unit was ground floor and near the manager's office. The place was shelved, from the previous commercial tenant, and practically dedicated to old detective books, a few How to Win at This or That type books, and one box of gambling statistics. To the left was what served as a bookcase. Shorty's hardbacks had been losing their spines to mice, but he had no more room in his condo, so he boxed up more books and left them in storage with the mice.

He went to the casino but only placed bets for others. He usually drank beer but had one straight bourbon at the casino bar and wondered out loud to the gambler on the next stool if new casinos have problem with mice. The gambler didn't know or care, and he figured the bartender wouldn't tell if he knew. Shorty went home early to his recliner, and his Corot. He wanted to study for his meeting with Emily.

Sister Emily's Friday evening was spent in the pulpit at the mission. The patrons of her Friday night sermons were few. Her "sonnies" were not in attendance because it was not required. The congregation was tending toward old veterans. Ox and his tiny-by-comparison, rather thin, straw-haired wife sat on the front row. Ox was nervous, but with leather jack and chains enough to make most of the congregation nervous too.

"The theme of my short talk is 'people are people' but we are going to approach it from the standpoint of what it means to be "one" with God."

"'Oneness' is good depending on who you are being one with. In John 16:33, John tells us Jesus said that He spoke the things He did because "in me you might have peace." If you're one with Christ, that's peaceful."

"The idea is to let the Lord do the work, but we can't press it so far that we cease to be who were are."

"Jesus talked about being one with the Father. In John 10:30, he says 'I and my Father are one.'

Yet he spoke of being quite separate from the Father. Just around these verses in John chapters 16 and 17, we have:

"'All things that the Father has are mine...' John 16:15." In

the next two verses, Jesus even repeats and says He goes to the Father. In John 16:26, Jesus speaks of His praying to the Father for you. In verse 28, He says He came from the Father and goes back to the Father. In verse 32, He says He is not alone because the Father is with Him."

"In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed `that they may be one, as we are.' John 17:11."

"In the culmination of the high priestly prayer, we have words so lofty one wants to approach them with white gloves:

`That they all may be one, as thou, father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.'"

"First Corinthians 6:17 tells us, `But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.'"

"Galatians 3:27 and 28 tells us: `For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

"The New Testament, particularly the Gospel of John, speaks to these matters of the divinity of the Lord, of Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit. But these are also in the Old."

"One of the Old Testament names of the Lord was and is Immanuel meaning God with Us."

"But do these Scriptures mean that angels worship you because you're one with Christ? No."

"I've been reading some books on the lives of great saints and God bless 'em, we can learn a lot from their lives, but you can see in the lives of some of them they so want to be one with God that they're really kind of wanting to drop out of the people category, and that's going too far. You've got to be in the Lord, but you in the Lord. We've got to read the whole book and not take any of it so far that it contradicts the rest."

"When the Scriptures speak of the relationship of the Father and Son as One, while there is a mystery, don't lose sight of the central message of singleness, no taking away, wholeness without contradiction, relationship without loss or diminution of any kind. The Father takes nothing away from the Son. The Holy Spirit takes nothing away from the Son."

"Next week, the text will be out of Mark 10: "And he (the blind man), casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus."

"I'm going to cut the sermon a little short tonight because we do have some people who've come for ministry, and they've got to get home to the babysitter. They're dear Assyrian people. Not Syrian but Assyrian. You remember Nineveh of the Bible and all that, well, Nineveh is dust and the Assyrians don't have a nation any more, but God's not forgotten his Assyrian people."

She stepped from the platform walking around past the velvet-covered altar that separated the speakers from the congregation. She was quick to business as Ox and his wife arose to stand before her.

"Your name is...?"

"Ox."

"Is there something else I could call you? What did your parents call you?"

"Scoop."

"Scoop? How did you get that name?"

"My mother said 'A cantaloupe has a scoop out of its middle, when it is served.' And I was such a big baby, well, she said, afterward, she felt like a cantaloupe. When she was happy with me, she'd call me the Scoop out of her middle. The guys call me 'Ox.' Everybody calls me 'Ox.'"

"'Ox' will do. An ox is a servant, quite honorable in a Biblical sense. The greatest of all is servant of all, which is to say, bless all over the place as Jesus did. Your wife has explained to you that Jesus is the door."

"Yes."

"You've been standing outside and you want to go inside, and Jesus is the door."

"Yes."

"Jesus is the door of entry, and the door of protection once you're on the inside. The Lord is a man of war. He is the high sheriff. He is the high priest over the house of God. You look a little nervous, big guy like you, you nervous?"

"I'm a little nervous, but I ain't scarred of nothing. Don't tell the guys, but I want to be more like my wife, more like Olive. What she's got, that's what I want."

"When you embrace the covenant founded on the cross, the blood of the everlasting covenant, this is a better covenant than the Old Testament. God writes the law on your heart, as He said He would to Jeremiah. The law written on stone, that law can longer cry out against you."

"Yes."

"You're under a new covenant based on the performance of Christ, not your own, although you do have responsibilities."

"Yes."

"The new covenant is also able to sever all old foolish covenants not of God. Even secret agreements where we've agreed with and gone along with something not of God. We sometimes need to renounce those and any benefits from covenants with the enemy of God. You understand?"

"Kind of. No."

"Out with the old, in with the new."

"Yes, out with the old, in with the new, that's what I want," he said.

"There is a difference in faith and faith that counts. Think of Jerusalem as where the Lord is, where He rules. You can believe Jerusalem is there, but that kind of faith doesn't do you any good. You've got to want to go there. You may make mistakes, and there is forgiveness in the walk. There is a parable of the good Samaritan where the hurt man is taken to an inn. The Father is the Innkeeper; He is the proprietor of the kingdom. In the parable, the good Samaritan is a type of Christ, so when the Samaritan says that whatever the bill at the inn, he will pay it, it means the Lord will not only pick us up and take us to the Father's kingdom, but there is on-going provision. His grace starts but doesn't subside, doesn't ebb back just because we're in the Father's kingdom. But you've got to turn, want to go to where the Lord is. You've not only got to believe Jerusalem is there but you've got to want to live there. Understand the difference? It is a citizenship question. Where do you want to live?"

"Where Olive lives."

"Jerusalem, that's the address, the postman may not know it but he will one day." Emily said. "This man believes and wants to move."

Emily stood on her tip toes and began, "Passing the border guards at the Egyptian border is a little scary." She got a little

louder and Emily was not one for loud: "Satan, you have been impeached by a higher authority. This man has by faith registered his citizenship in the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom God called him to. The Lord will dwell with his people, this is the central message. This is the kingdom whose Head is all powerful, a king whose dominion is such that he crushes other dominions. Jeremiah 31 tells us, 'For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.' Rome may claim to be the eternal city, but Jeremiah 31 also ends by telling us that Jerusalem is the eternal city, which we also see in the last unravelings of salvation in the book of Revelation wherein you make a final, total separation of the kingdom of life and the kingdom of death. The scepter is the Lord's, and righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom. There is no reason for His kingdom to ever be overthrown."

"This man is now part of spiritual Israel and the Lord does make a difference between spiritual Egypt and spiritual Israel. Exodus 11:7. Show forth in his life, Father, that the ministration of the law unto death is passed in the sacrifice of the Son. I stand before the bar of heaven with good and rightful arguments, pleading the power of the cross, and the covenant that says this man is now God's people. Hebrews chapter 8 and 10. The same God Who hung the stars is attentive to our salvation. Father, I ask for this man's complete deliverance from bondage in body and soul. Now, demons, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, in the name of the Lord, I am bigger than you are...."

There was more but suffice it to say it was a quick work. Ox and his straw-haired wife would get home lighter and in time to keep the babysitter happy.

"You are a very big man, Ox. I want you to get all of you into the kingdom, by that I mean you've got to read the Scriptures and think about them, and ask questions." He agreed those terms were fair.

She left him that night with the following exchange at the church door.

"I understand you're a mighty hunter."

"I hunt."

"With a gun?"

"And a bow."

"What do you hunt?"

"Mostly deer."

"If needful, one might fell a deer, but does that make one a mighty hunter? Is it not more important to train one's spirit in warfare, in intercession? Is it not more useful to minister a blow in the heavenlies than to bother a fawn? And we ask the Lord to give you wisdom; the word on the mark, the word that solves the problem, silence at the right time, the deed that suits the circumstance, these are more important than shooting arrows through the thicket. Something to think about. Don't let what you take pride in keep you from the more important lessons that the Lord has for you in the Spirit. And learning how to pray is more important than hunting out in the bushes."

"Ok."

"The Holy Spirit took Ezekiel by the lock of his hairs and gave him visions of the Lord. The Holy Spirit gave John visions on Patmos. The same Holy Spirit is in you."

"I feel different."

"The Bible is a family album, not a dry, distant book. You'll meet those people some day. And don't be scared to read the Bible."

"I ain't scared of nothing."

"Well, don't be scared of the Lord's book. A dictionary can be a fearful thing, so many words you don't know gathered together in one place, but not so fearful when you take them on one at a time. The Bible is for the scholar and the beginner. The Lord speaks to His children, heart to heart, Spirit to spirit. When you think you've forgotten and the time comes that you need a Scripture, the Holy Spirit will just bring it to mind."

"Like a crib sheet in school."

"But it isn't cheating, it is grace. The teacher can't tell the Lord He can't give you an answer just because it is on a test. He will help you pass the exams of life."

"That's great," said Ox. His wife looked up to nod. She'd been in the loudest silent prayer you ever heard or saw.

"The Lord will likely even show you things no one else sees, so you can explain them to us. But you can't like steal things. If God gives you something, you say..."

"God gimme it."

"Right."

"The Scriptures say that if we live in the Spirit, we should also

walk in the Spirit. The Lord will give us the idea behind the thing but keep it personal. The Lord's truth is conceptual, and He will share in that way, but also personal. To walk in the Spirit is to walk so softly one can hear the Lord's footsteps."

"That's easy for you to say, you're so small."

"One step at a time. You ever read the Bible?"

"Once, really no."

"You don't know what you're missing. One of the best days in modern times was when the Catholic church began to let their people read the whole Bible and not just a verse doled out here and there. Old Sour...Sister Margaret told me about it. Paul said something to the effect that he didn't want to lord it over anybody but be a helper of their joy. The one the Lord sets free is free indeed. The Scripture does say the less is blessed of the better, so we receive of what the Lord has, and we learn from what the Lord has poured into those who have been walking with the Lord a long time. The Lord did not bring you into the kingdom of light to leave you sightless. Your name `Ox' implies a servant, and a servant is good, but you're more than a servant, a brother, and a friend, everybody has to come through the same door. Nobody here will lord it over you, or I'll smack 'em, but not really. Ok?"

"Ok."

"Walk softly."

"Ok."

"Read the Bible."

"Ok."

Emily got to bed earlier than usual for a Friday night. She read herself to sleep with Jeremiah 31, one of her favorite chapters.

Chapter 10

Came Saturday and Shorty sat at the picnic-type tables just outside the starter's window at the Roosevelt golf course in Griffith park. He sat with two of his golf foursome, Doc having left right after their nine holes. Sanchez had directed National Geographic documentaries but stopped traveling to do simple little lesson type shows for public television. Simon was workwise a peer, a twelve-year veteran in Shorty's department, and golf wise, easily the best player of the group. Shorty was not quite the worst golfer of the group. Doc had that distinction.

Simon offered Shorty a tip. "You've got to get up higher, get up a little farther off the ground, Shorty. I saw a lesson on tv and they were asking...I forget who the pro was, whether he believed in keeping the left heel on the ground. And he said while some the modern players say the left heel is to stay on the ground, the people who say that are tall people. If you're normal height, the left heel has to come up off the ground when you swing. Shorty, if he'd map out your perfect swing, he's probably say your left heel ought to come up knee high, I'd say. You're not hitting it as far as you used to, Shorty, you need to experiment."

"If they ever have elevator events in the olympics, now that's my event, did I ever show you?"

"Many times," said Simon.

"Not all of us get a chance to go out in the boats and swamps and take pictures of alligators and tigers and exciting things. Some of us are just too short."

"Trailing animals is fun for a year but not much fun after ten years. I'm happy to go to the studio every day. If I didn't do what I do, I'd start a rubber band repair service, I guess," said Sanchez.

"On C-SPAN, I saw...", started Simon.

"No politics, politics and we'll be here all day. No politics or religion."

Shorty said, "I was going through a cafeteria line and see an old old couple. And the old guy takes some food and puts it on his plate, wobbling all the time. And the old woman, takes it off his plate and says something like 'You'll be up all night..' And she takes it back, her wobbling all the way."

"It's as if she is doing such a bang up job of living that she

just drops right inside of him and lives his life too. Now that's sad," said Simon.

"You're right," said Sanchez.

"But sadder than that was your putt on the eighth, Shorty," said Simon. "Now that was sad. You've got to work to miss a putt that short."

"I went to the art museum."

"That's no excuse for your putt on the eighth."

"You used the membership we got you at the office for your birthday," said Simon. "I was betting you wouldn't even use it but no one would take the bet."

"I was at the museum, and this toddler broke away from his mother's hand, and toddled over to this really dark, terrifying painting, black and dark. The little fella took one look, said 'Bad,' and scurried right on back to its mother. Let's do the same with my putt on the eighth. Some things you can't explain. Let's just toddle away from that whole subject and not look back."

"But you're not yourself, Shorty, I think you ought to see a doctor," said Sanchez.

"I see a doctor every time I play golf."

"Not Doc, I mean a real doctor."

"Somehow, you can't envision someone you play golf with as a real doctor. You just can't see people do what they do on a golf course, see them do so poorly what they try to do well on a golf course, and then go in and ask the same guy life and death questions. I can't see it. I'd never go to Doc as an actual doctor."

"I've got to go. Doc's my doctor anyway. He's cheap, and he takes my marker."

"You got a date, Shorty?," asked Simon.

"I've got to see a lady about a painter."

"Uh, oh. And no beer today. I read that Van Gogh was short and ugly and unsociable. That's your kind of artist, Shorty," said Simon.

"Shorty's got a date, how could that be? I've resisted but I've got to ask about the cap. What is it with the Lakers' cap? You

don't follow basketball. You don't really follow any sports. Pistol Pete was a giant compared to you."

"It's not a date, and let's just say I'm thinking tall. I've got to go. I'm gonna be late."

Shorty arrived at the meeting place, where Wilshire ends at the statue of the lady Saint Monica in the Santa Monica park that gives a cliff view of the highway and sand and ocean below. He was some minutes late because he could not easily find a place to park. He scurried with his tote bag of Corot books, books of art mingled with biography.

His first impression of Emily in the park was somewhat of a disappointment.

Some at the mission held that a woman should be unpowdered and unrouged, unmade up as it were. Sometimes, this is even a theory of feminine beauty. It is a theory abandoned when years and spouses are together for a sufficient period, which is to say it is a young man's theory. A man of middle years with a wife of middle years will appreciate his wife's efforts along these lines. Emily's face was soft, not angular, and only slightly made up.

With some, the matter of cosmetics was not cosmetic at all, but rather one of faith, even doctrine, that with the powdering and rouging out go the morals. But Sister Emily did not agree.

She beautified herself with a humble spirit, but added powders and even lipstick to the outside to enhance the attractiveness of the overall package as much as possible. "The Lord redeems wholly," she would say, "not just the spirit," and when the outside needed a fresh paint, it seemed not deceptive or entrapping but simply consistent with redemption as she understood it.

Where Emily learned her beautifying secrets was itself a secret - even I couldn't find out. Her family of the female lineage opted to go undecorated as to natural facial features - creams were permitted as medicinal but rouge and lipstick could make one as a billboard woman. Lipstick was saved for special occasions, although there were a lot of special occasions as Emily reckoned. What red there was was oh so nicely done, as to remind one of those small little thimbles of red in a Corot. While in a Corot, the touch of red was usually well placed amid a lovely landscape with such lovely, silvery images leading upward, in the sky and upper leaves - a touch of white lead in the pigments adding to the beauty in some inexplicable way. In Sister Emily, the analogy breaks down at that point - the "landscape" of general aesthetics of her physiognomy was not lovely but plain.

Windswept might describe the landscape of Emily's cheeks in that tiny little undulations could be found on each, as if a windstorm had left pretty little surprises in a plain field.

Corot painted one well-praised windy landscape, a gale force exception to his usual landscapes decorated with tranquility as well as beauty. There was an obvious peace and tranquility to Emily, and so she was typical Corot in that sense, in the landscape sense with all the little touches in the right places.

As for windy, Emily spoke softly and fluidly, a combination rare among preachers, which she was, underneath the title "chaplain." As with Corot, gales were not unheard of - in Emily they were more frequent than with Corot. With Emily, gusts were most often found when an emotional topic combined with a fresh insight during a sermon, when fresh insight joined with Scripture in mid-sermon. Fresh insight is much more containable in one's private study.

Emily considered the occasion special enough as evidenced by the light brush strokes of lipstick that came with her to the park that day. But Emily regularly walked some park, and when she walked she came prepared. She came in track-type shoes and loose-fitting brown trousers, and a buttoned up wool coat to the chin.

The sight was somewhat of a disappointment compared to Emily in the museum. Museums were strolled, parks were walked, and no one ever said Emily did not have a stride. When she went to the park, she came both to relax and work.

Park walking was not one of Shorty's activities; walk meant golf and to Shorty, parks were mainly to drive by. Shorty came in street shoes, work shoes well shined, a light blue wind-breaker type jacket (it was chilly), his red beret, and a quiet tie. The sport shirt underneath had never known anything but an open-neck, was unused to the yoke of a tie, but if it had been for view, one would note, solid color, tasteful sport shirt, quiet tie with slight pattern, bright red beret - a nice look, even arty on a day designated for art, yet not quite suited to the day or the day's activities. Shorty and Emily were comparable height wise but not stride wise. Even in later walks when Shorty would wear track-type shoes, he would have difficulty keeping pace with Emily.

"I see you brought you a tote bag. I hope you brought quarters. It is almost impossible to park for free in Santa Monica."

"Nice of you to help me get started in art study. I appreciate your taking the time."

"I come here anyway sometimes for prayer walks, and it seemed

better than downtown. Thanks for coming some distance."

It was a particularly windy and brisk day. The sheer quantity of things botanical in the Santa Monica park were less than in a Corot. One sometimes forgets that the desert nearly encroaches upon Los Angeles.

In his "Windswept Landscape," the height of the trees seem ten-fold that of the hunched, white-capped or kerchiefed figure going the wind's way down the path. The path is almost not recognizable, almost blown away. The massive trees are bent over even more so than the crouched, traveling figure. The painting was criticized by some Corot purists, more accustomed to soothing respites when they entered Corot's world. The wind this day was not one to make one bend over, but it made difficult the task of handling and discussing the four Corot books. But the first order of business was Corot and his world, and they sat at the first available bench on the downwind side of that deceptively lovely but cold stone statue where Wilshire ends in Santa Monica.

As they sat at the bench facing seaward, Emily began, "Well, where do we begin?"

"I don't know."

"Why Corot, are you French?"

"French turned Polish turned American."

"Odd, one doesn't find many migrations from France to Poland. Chopin was French and Polish, but Polish turned to French. Why would one's ancestors leave France for Poland?"

"I wouldn't know. I know a bit of our family history but not many details. The Nazis overtook Poland in a matter of days. Poland survived the Nazis only to be overtaken by the Russians. I think of Poland as God's frontrunner for the world's most conquered country."

"Why the interest in Corot? Among all the artists, he is not the most famous, yet you asked of him, without knowing much of anything about him. May I ask why?"

"The story goes that one of my ancestors was sheltered for a long time in an orphanage funded by Corot, and his portrait hung on the walls. It was the ancestor that left France for Poland, but he was for years sheltered there, and the story was passed down."

"Ah, so you are a descendant of Corot's kindness. Corot was often called Papa Corot, although he never had natural children."

"I'd never thought of it that way."

"Oh, yes, as I and countless others are descendants of the Lord's kindness."

"Do you think acts of kindness can establish a lineage?"

"Of course, acts of kindness can birth a whole new life."

"I even read in one of the books of the orphanage at Rue Vandrezanne, however you pronounce it."

"I had a young man from Texas at the mission charged with the responsibility of pronouncing "John Jacque" over an in-law and it was quite a problem. There are parts of the world where a Texan trying to pronounce French names is a misdemeanor, the story goes."

Shorty began his book report. "In reading about his generosity, one of the books said he was so generous that he'd sometimes put his own signature on a painting of a struggling young artist so he could get some income. There were apparently many forgeries of Corot's work, and that didn't help because there were stories like that. He bought a house for a starving artist, helped widows."

"When an artist signs a work with his name, and it is good, it is the Lord's generosity for the Lord does the work if it is good. We sometimes think God instills talent and then goes away, but it is a much more on-going, delicate process by which the Lord works in the earth. 'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works....' Ephesians 2. And I think that includes good paintings if that's the work the Lord has for you. It may be that Corot's charity is more important than his paintings, that is difficult to say."

"But his painting are still around," commented Shorty.

"But the trails of his kindness are still with us too. You are a witness. Who's to say what the result is today of a kindness rendered a hundred years ago, who is to measure?"

"I suppose it is difficult to measure."

"The important thing is to put the Artist Jesus' brush strokes on the people around us. Corot did not neglect this or the art for which he's more famous."

"I enjoyed reading about him."

"It is good to know something of a man and mix it up with the study of his art. I remember glancing at a Gauguin diary - Lord

help Scripture to stay to mind like some of the junk we read - but the phrase I read was, 'If I should say I love you, my teeth would fall out.' Gauguin was dark, quite a different character than Corot. Let's just play with Corot a bit, let's just look and talk and play, make it fun." Taking one of the books, "'The Pond at Ville D'Avray,' ah, that's lovely."

"But not a lot of color."

"Yes, sometimes, one wants to order up some brighter colors, like a Renoir. Corot was like a middle-aged to older man when the now famous Impressionists were young and not so famous. Many of them, Monet and Renoir as I recall, had wonderful things to say of Corot. And Pissarro called himself a pupil of Corot."

"I've heard the names but I don't know much."

"'Sourvenir of Montefontaine,' now there is something quite lovely about this also. Give me the other book...More and bigger pictures in a big book. Big books go faster than little books; it is an axiom in art circles...that I just made up. I love this, 'Man Scything by a Willow-Plot' the little touch of red on the man's jacket, the silvery touches in the trees, apparently a mother in the small clearing."

Pointing to a painting in his biggest book, Shorty points, "I like this, a little fuzzy but I like it."

"'The Cathedral of Mantes,' very peaceful, someone in a red cap, peacefully fishing, the thinning of the leaves on the trees, not lush but lovely."

"Here's an interesting comment. I mentioned Renoir liked Corot. Renoir said, 'What I so much like in Corot, is that with a bit of a tree he gives us everything.'"

"I read where Corot liked to paint what he saw, even to the point of buying books the color he wanted if his model was reading a book, and his models, so many of them, seem to always be reading," said Shorty.

"Yet he 'rearranged' things too. Here is a story of someone looking over his shoulder as he painted out of doors, asking where was the tree, and Corot with his pipe pointed to the tree behind him. Did you read about any famous people in his life, besides artists."

"There was a story that when he finally started to get some success, which was late in life, that Queen Victoria came to buy one of his paintings and got shut out," said Shorty.

"I recall from something that I read that his father was a

merchant and wanted him to be in business, but he was awful in the shop, and was so shy, he'd blush at the young ladies. But I also gather from this I'm reading here of quotes from some of his letters that he got over that perhaps in Italy."

"He went to Italy three times I read, it says here."

Emily said, "And traveled all over, but often not far, just to different parts of France, and to Switzerland. But Corot's trips to Italy are famous."

"It seems disputed from the different writers, but he went to Italy the first time and may not have spent much time studying the masters but went to the Italian countryside and places in Italy that he wanted to just see," said Shorty.

Emily said, "But I read that his father late in life, after he'd won the Legion of Honor, that his father apologized for giving him such a hard time. As I recall, I read some reference sources about Corot and have read something of him over the years, and as I recall, he opted for the income from capital made possible by the premature death of one of his sisters, and it was the source that gave him some degree of independence, until he had some degree of success. He was long time dependent on that income and his parents, as I recall."

Shorty added, "When he got famous, one of the books said he got invited to a snooty party, Victor Hugo threw it I think, anyway, he ended up playing with the children. On the other hand, on other occasions, it seemed that he was very friendly, and often stayed in friends' homes, and did the artists' cafe scene with his friends."

"There is much of Corot that seems a balancing act. He was zealous for approval of the Academy, the official arbiter of tastes, and courted their approval and acceptance, yet he was also independent. Trained in classical styles yet the Impressionists would lay some claim to him also."

Shorty added. "He avoided factions, and congratulated someone on not joining the Impressionists as a club. There was a Napoleon the Third that bought one of his paintings. Was that the famous Waterloo Napoleon, freezin' in Russia in the movies, Audrey Hepburn and the guys I forget?"

"Let's see, it says Corot was born just before the turn into the 1800's and died in 1875. Napoleon got famous but not into power in the French Revolution. Those who put themselves into power with the French Revolution didn't last long. The regime that was in power just before Napoleon came into power were very anti-Christian, and Napoleon was no saint. This was the famous Napoleon. This would have been going on when Corot was in knee

pants or so, but there were many upheavals and political troubles during Corot's life."

"I gather some of that from reading about Corot but don't really understand the history much.

"I saw an interesting movie about that era - called 'Babbette's Feast.' A woman flees the troubles in Napoleonic France and goes to a Northern country and gets refuge from a small Christian group, very strict in their ways. In gratitude, she prepares a feast, typifying the marriage supper of the Lamb - the meal we are to enjoy with the Lord when the brink of eternity peeks around the corner and sin and death will in the foreseeable future be no more...and about that time, if 'time' is still around, the food gets much, much better."

"So Corot fled to paint a church, and Babbette fled to cook."

"And they both may have accomplished more than the politicians," said Emily.

They browsed the books and chatted about the narrative of the artist Corot, the books he read, the people he knew, the places he went to, and admixed the narrative with the visual result of Corot's brush.

All of a sudden, Sister Emily leapt to her feet, "Don't forget your meter. We may live in an age of grace but we still have to contend with meters that expire. Need quarters?"

"I'm a little short."

"Here's two, which won't buy much time in Santa Monica, we'll buy a paper and swap the paper stand owner for parking change. Meet you back here in five minutes, but down about a hundred yards. And leave the books in the car. We'll take a blessing walk."

"What kind of walk?"

"I'll explain, just meet me down there."

When they rejoined, Emily explained: "I often do prayer walks, or simply blessing walks. Even when one agrees to join the family and one's spirit is born again and mingled with the Lord's Spirit, the spirit still needs training. I ask the Lord to train my spirit to bless, just simply bless, beckon the Lord to move on behalf of those I see, those He puts in my path. When I work, I get into the details of the workings, the causes and effects and the goings-on that can get so complicated and discouraging. But even with that work, there is prayer. We don't always understand but believe that God will change things."

"I sometimes feel that there is very little I can do to help the cases assigned to me."

"A baby's hand. Will it paint, pamper, and who is to say, Mom, Dad, Me, the baby, all four or more? How complex is the matrix? And who created all the categories of the matrix? When God loosed the baby, were the options pre-set? We don't always understand the whole matrix, but we are to realize that the matrix cannot withstand the power of prayer in righteousness, the prayer of blessing. The matrix will move with prayer, and that is because of the cross, and our link by faith. Scratch even the kernel of faith in the bountiful Savior, and watch the earth move to make itself ready for His coming."

"I'll walk and watch."

She smiled and with raised eyebrows added, "It is great fun."

There walked by a thin woman, with the top a bit bare as to show what looked like famine as the upper torso worked into the corners of the shoulder. She carried a wrap but even when it was about her shoulders, the signs of famine seemed to show through. She seemed not only thin but hollow, as if the Master Molder formed her as a museum piece and not to show real life. There were deep creases in the cheeks. "As if finger nails on the blackboard of God's creation; you can almost hear the screeches" said Sister Emily. "It makes me mad to see the enemy's flawing of God's beautiful craftsmanship."

The woman became a prayer task. Emily followed her around for a full lap of the park, making quiet supplication for her benefit. "Oh, God, she is so needy. Father God, Lord God Jehovah, Maker of Heaven and Earth. You told Moses when he did not speak well that You'd made him, and as Creator you could repair or make new. Oh, Father God, the good God, God of covenant and promise and blessing, Lord God, move on this woman's behalf. If she has cursed you in the past to her detriment, Father God, forgive her. Send fresh hope. She looks like she will plop over from the burden of sin. Lord, as celery droops from over exposure, so Lord she wilts and droops on the inside, even as she stands aright; help her, Lord, I pray. Help this limp, celery stalk of a woman that the enemy has tried to destroy. Thank you, Lord Jesus, we pray."

This was one of many such prayers. Emily spoke of teaching one's spirit to bless, habitually yet spontaneously, some little spark of want to igniting God's ability to, all the while it was His want to sparking Emily's prayers.

It was second nature, this blessing side of Sister Emily, and she'd go from intercession to the mundane as smooth as a limousine would adjust just so to take a small hill or slow down

for an incline. An abrupt slow down, as for a speed bump, was usually a child worth seeing or an obvious need worth praying about quickly. Such was a walk in the Santa Monica park with Sister Emily.

"We want to put brush strokes of blessing on God's creation," she'd say. "The Lord is the Master Artist and we cannot improve on His image, but the privilege of prayer is such a blessing. It is as if He lets us stand at His shoulder and make brush strokes of restoration, brush strokes of creation even. Nothing is impossible with God. Ah, it is such a blessing to pray. I love it. There is nothing I'd rather do."

Shorty had to work hard to stay up with Sister Emily. She obviously lived in a world he'd never seen. Three hours passed and there were no more quarters to be had from the newsstand vendor, without buying Architectural Digest or something rather expensive. The day with Sister Emily in the park ended with a simple "thank you." He'd planned to invite her to a meal or coffee but the afternoon was too full.

But the prayer walk in the park was admixed with foolishness and chat and a basketful of topics whereby people get acquainted and even become friends.

Seeing a little girl with a kitten, Shorty remarked, "Someone ought to warn that little girl that that kitten is going to grow up and be a cat someday." Shorty didn't like cats or at least didn't understand them. "I could walk into the same room and see the same cat every day for a month, and every day, I'd walk out of that room and ask myself, 'What was that?' I know it is a cat, but I don't know it either. Did God make cats?"

"Yes."

"Just yes, you're sure?"

"Yes. I think it was William Blake who wrote a famous poem about the tiger. 'Did God who made the lamb make you too?,' he asked. "It may have been a good poem, but it wasn't much of a question. It was an of course kind of question. Cat's paws, hind's feet, galoshes. All designed with the wisdom of God to the task at hand. It is usually easy to believe that God can form the cat's paw, but harder to believe He works through the one that made the rubber boots. And we walk with the quiet of a cat's paw around the topic of our own faults, and put on combat boots for kicking those in need, those who may need our prayers like a life jacket."

"If he'd had your address, he could have just written Emily and she'd have told him."

"Yes," she nodded.

"Yes," Shorty said, impressed.

But a whole cat is more than a fur-ball, and a note is in order as to how "fur-ball" came to mean "next" on their visits to museums, and whenever it was time to change topics. It was Emily's term but Shorty took to it right away because he didn't really much like (understand) cats anyway. The topic arose in an art context or specifically, where you draw the line. Emily, on one of their later visits to a not very good exhibit, explained. "Some would argue that you could take the fluff of a cat from Madagascar, and a fur-ball of a kitten from China, and another fur-ball from another cat in New Zealand, and another in Chile, and put them all together into an exhibit, side by side, to see what could be gleaned from the comparison... a fur-ball museum if you will. And some would argue for it. Some would say the ozone-layer over Madagascar is a little bit less so than the ozone-layer over China, and wonder what effect it would have on the fur-ball in question. One might wonder whether the ozone-layer was just generally having an adverse effect on the coloration of cats worldwide, and if the problem was progressing, which would necessitate a perseverance in your fur-ball museum director; a long-term commitment would have to be made to collect fur-balls from many areas over a longer period of time, so they could be juxtaposed and studied over a long period of time. And another would wonder just what aesthetics there was to be gleaned in the study of a fur-ball apart from the cat proper, and if God did make the cat, did He also make the fur-ball?, or was that part of the fall? Why would God make fur and then have it fall off? Why would God make a fur-ball? And while all these arguments could be entertained," Emily explained to Shorty, "at some point, You have to sit back and ask yourself, Where do I draw the line? Isn't there a place to sit back and say, all I've got here is a fur-ball museum, and from a broader perspective, a fur-ball museum just isn't worth the effort, or the necessary restraining of the cats, assuming the museum director isn't patient enough to just await fur-balls after they're loosed from the cat." And this is how on their walks through museums, a painting that just wasn't worth the look elicited a matter-of-fact "fur-ball" comment from one or the other, and a nod of agreement put the couple on to the next painting. And eventually, "fur-ball" just came to mean "next," either at the museum, as well as at other places. But all that developed later.

"How did you get into work as a parole officer? Were you ever in the service?," asked Emily.

"The military, no, I flunked the soldier-judging, entry level part, just like I couldn't get into the LAPD."

"Were your ancestors ever in the military?," she asked.

"No, hear tell they were Quakers, and they didn't have to go."

"You raised a Quaker?"

"Oh, no, I think there was some Catholic and Quaker in the history. I was raised nothin', maybe a little bit of Catholic, not so's you'd notice, but basically more out of Quaker stock I understand. I think it was the orphan guy in France who started it. I think he was the first Quaker in our line. It faded out though."

"Did you know the Quakers are still around?"

"Somewhere I suppose."

"No, here in LA, they are still around. They're even in the yellow pages."

"I don't think any of our family was ever in the military," said Shorty.

"Did you know Quakers used to go to jail for not going into the military?"

"What if they were too short to get into the military anyway, did they just arrest you for being a Quaker."

"I don't know. And they arrested Quakers for not taking oaths."

"I didn't know that," he said.

"It used to be a very important duty to take an oath of allegiance to the state, and Quakers wouldn't take oaths on religious grounds because the Bible says 'don't swear,' so they'd arrest them."

"How do you know so much?"

"There was a little Quaker heritage on my mother's side, and Mennonite heritage, and Baptist, and Lutheran, a quilt patch of different things - a heathen here and there. I don't agree with the idea you can't take an oath. The basic idea is let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.' If you swear sometimes, it raises the question, are you lying when you're not taking an oath? There's a Scripture that says let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be no.' It is important to speak truthfully. That is why I took you to task for speaking the Lord's name over that awful painting. To look at a mess and ascribe the Lord's name to it is simply a lie, not the fact of the matter."

"But when guys try to get tough with me about not being in the military, I ask 'em if they've ever passed a kidney stone. Did you ever moan and groan and rock back and forth, like the Jews do at the wailing wall, just because something in your body told you you needed to? Did you ever sweat just from the pain? A kidney stone story will get you into a lot of clubs."

"Did you ever pass a kidney stone?"

"No, but I heard the story. Doc told me about his and he says he thinks I ought to have one. What about you? Were you ever in the military?"

"No, but I grew up on military bases. My father was a military chaplain, and we traveled all over the world in service. He is a missionary now in Singapore. He said the Lord gave him a country because he was faithful in the little things, meaning me and my sister."

The tally count of people in the park blessed by Sister Emily's prayers and interjection of Scripture on other's behalf or a simple, "Oh, bless them, Lord," was well into the hundreds, even though the park was relatively uncrowded due to the strong winds. This is if you count the people around the newsstand and its owner.

As Sister Emily drove back from her prayer walk and time with Shorty, she prayed, as she often did in the car:

"Oh, Father God, Lord God Jehovah, Maker of Heaven and Earth, Almighty God, I pray you'll not only save this man Shorty, who does not know you, but that you'll make him an intercessor. Give him a prayer burden, and a heart of blessing. And quicken his step a bit. He can hardly keep up. It would be nice to have a companion on my prayer walks...But he does seem to have trouble with his pants somehow. Help him keep his pants up, if that's the problem, Lord, You know. You give him direction."

Sister Emily was one to be concerned about whether good deeds, such as prayer walks, might build up pride. I am told she addressed that topic with further prayer:

"Father, your Word says that it is our duty is to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Father, I thank You that you purpose to include us in the process, that you purpose to work through us. I count prayer a privilege. I thank you for the responsibility of souls, the responsibility of blessing. I do not bring to you my prayers as if they created a debt for You. The Scriptures give an accounting and say that your balance sheet is all assets. You own it all, at least everything worth having that doesn't get discarded, and You have no liabilities. It would be a wrongful attitude to use our time

together to make out as if You owed me as a result of these prayer walks. I count it a privilege to participate in what You are about to do by way of the privilege of prayer. I count it a blessing and tell You so. My goal in prayer is to get your work done, and for me to get deeper in debt to You. Father, Isaiah 57 says that You inhabit eternity, that Your name is Holy, and that you dwell in the high and holy place with those that are of a humble and contrite spirit. And it says more that I can't remember just now. I would seek to humble myself before you. Don't let me get puffed up. Thanks in prayer."

She quieted herself a few seconds for a much pregnant woman toddling along in a crosswalk but then she whispered an aside to the Lord: "That woman is the baby's provider, the baby's defender, a fender if you will, a fender with many dents no doubt, but she looks like a balloon. The Scriptures say You are our fortress and high tower, not Mom. So inside the fortress, Mom the Balloon, and inside her is the next generation. Only You God would come up with such a system."

She continued her previous thought. "The work of the cross is finished, once for all, Hebrews says, and the more we talk about it, and the more we mention it in prayer, still more the work gets done, and the deeper in debt we get. 'Don't owe any man anything but love,' your book says. I count what I owe others for their kindnesses just more debt to You. But I thank them, I don't even want to owe man a thank you, a gratitude unpaid. But Lord, let me get deeper in debt to You, which is to say, I'd take it very kindly if you'd look kindly upon all my prayers this day. And I'm sorry for what I called that guy who scared me on the drive over. I don't know that he is that...what I called him. Eraser to that, if You will, kindly, again. I would ask gently, though, Lord, I would not stomp down your halls in heavy boots. What a nice day it's been, Lord. Sometimes, in the Psalms I think it is, King David announced that his prayers were over, or the scribe announced it. Well, I guess Emily's prayers are over for now."

"Thanks for this nice day, Lord. Your Scripture asks us to ask, what do we have we didn't get from You? Help me not to fear to sacrifice back to You some portion of what You've given me. Help me not to be ungrateful. Ingratitude is as a thorn bush, I fear, and I don't want it in my life, thank you very much."

"Lord, you gave me this day out of eternity. One of those Corot books said that when Corot was asked why he didn't seem to finish his pictures, he replied, 'What do you do with infinity?' Lord, eternity, did you finish it? Is eternity something you finished already and each day is like a package that you give away? God, eternity, did you finish it?"

She turned on the radio but quickly turned it off. "But Lord, I

did have a question. I was wondering more about how you work with us in groups. I was visiting that fancy church with the fancy organ and the guy playing, and pulling on this, and patting his foot on that. And he'd pull something, and out would come a little different toot, and he'd pat on something, and seemingly, everything would pick up or go down or something. When you've got something to be done, and it takes more than one, well, God, are you like an Organist?

Do you write it all in advance, and do you kick one in the shins and get 'em to go a little higher, or pull on one's ear and get 'em to quit looking down and sing more straight ahead. There is free will here and there and everywhere, and how do you get all them together to get done what You need to get done when what needs to be done takes more than one? How do you do that? The seamen who tossed Jonah over the side for running away from You; how did You get 'em to do that?

I don't think you're an Organist since that implies we're the organ, and one's a pull stop this and one's a peddle for that, and we, your church, don't much look like an organ, I wouldn't think. Father God, are You like an Organist?

Or are You more like a Conductor, and we more like different instruments in a symphony? How do we know if our note is to be high or low, and here or later, I mean really, how do we know? We know to do this and that and not this and that, but how do we know which to do when, and which has the priority? Are you like a Conductor and everyone is supposed to see the beat?"

"Father God, the Lord said He only did what He saw you do. Now we have the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Does the Holy Spirit just kind of get us there on the downbeat? Now the Scripture says we cannot look upon the Father and live, yet the Sermon on the Mount says the pure in heart will see God, and surely that means someday, You, Father. Now, let's see, Jesus can see the Father. He could see the Father back before and during His time on earth, and surely now that He's seated on the right hand. Maybe we can't, not yet, not without your opening our spiritual eyes, anyway. Your Song says the Bride has doves' eyes, and I think that speaks of the Holy Spirit, so the Bride has the eyes of the Holy Spirit and can see into the Spirit. Wouldn't that be something to see a heavenly concert, like with the angels, like in Revelation?"

When Sister Emily got into Revelation and was driving, well, that could be a dangerous combination. The line of inquiry changed somewhat.

"Oh, Father, your ways are exciting. `Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered in the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God had revealed

them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.' I'm ready for a concert."

"Now Your Scripture tells us the work of God is to believe on the Son. Salvation by faith, so we can't come to you and say, Surely I saved me some, surely I saved me some, surely. No, we can't bring that line to you. And it says faith works by love. It says faith without works is dead, faith does not result in a coma, thank you very much. It says, in Hebrews 11, as if I had to tell You, that `through faith we understand...' I so would like to understand more. Now where do we start - faith before works, love before faith, understanding after faith. I think I need more love, then I'll have more faith, then I'll have more understanding. Lord, is that the flow? Is that kind of the ups and downs, the wavy line of how your things work? Did I kind of get the order right?"

She took her hand from the wheel long enough to make a waving motion with the free hand. Seeing a couple arm in arm on the sidewalk, she added: "Lord, are You like a Matchmaker, when You're not conducting?" Then she had a thought that she hesitated to say out loud to the Lord, but then she did. "Lord, Creator, You ordained the marriage bed. You cause all to bee. Oh, my." The thought caused her to laugh out loud, but she added, "But you ordain some to the single life." She was soon back to questions.

"Lord, if you can write the law on our hearts, can we hear a good sermon and take notes in the Spirit?"

This went on till Emily got home, and then after she got home. Her talks with God in her car were "open air," as were her talks with God in her garden, a single row by the mission fence. When she worked her garden, she often tied her skirt between her legs, and head down, sang or prayed without worrying if others were listening. There was precedent. Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden, and so did Emily. Shorty found her coming out of the garden one day, skirt tied between her legs, hands dirty, mostly caught up in prayer, and the contrast of Emily the gardener and Emily dressed for the museum amused him no end.

Emily's talks with God in the laundry room at the mission often, but not always, were on paper, not a diary per se, a diary wouldn't hold all the goings on in Emily's spirit.

The Gospel of John closes with the inadequacy of books to record all that the Lord does. "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

The same could be said of all that Sister Emily asked when she talked to the Lord. As baseball is a pleasure and avocation to some, truthful asking and seeking were a pleasure and avocation to Emily which she continually mixed with her main line of work, which was blessing (and believing on the Son, of course).

Chapter 11

Shorty treated himself to a chopped sirloin steak and four cups of coffee at the Taylors Steak house in the unlikely area of Little Korea, 8th street. A most un-Korean dining room of high backed, red booths and bar and waiters and waitresses who'd been waiting forever. It was old school, familiar surroundings.

Shorty stopped off on 6th street at Wayne's corner to give him a few dollars. There was little to spark their conversation and Shorty was quickly on his way. Wayne didn't know anything about Corot. Shorty forgot to ask him about the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, that Corot read at times.

Shorty passed a huge church at the bend near the old library branch on 6th, across from the LA County Superior Court building. It was fenced, which wasn't true in the past, but the gate was open. Shorty had seen this huge Congregationalist church on many occasions but stopped only once to hear a free Bach concert, which wasn't free enough - he'd walked out fifteen minutes into the music.

This time he stopped and entered the wide-open door. It was nearly dark outside, and the sign indicated the church would close in fifteen minutes. He went in and took a far left, far back seat. He was the only one in the church.

He sat and just thought. There weren't any Bibles in the pew he chose, and he didn't come to read anyway. He just sat in silence, as if perhaps if he came into a church, God would somehow say "Hello, Shorty" or whatever the procedure or etiquette is. But there was only silence.

"Maybe this doesn't work unless you kneel." He looked around and started to kneel. But then the caretaker came in, saw Shorty, who saw the caretaker, which caused Shorty to jump, which caused the caretaker to jump. Shorty quickly left. The caretaker gave him plenty of room to do so. "I hate it when they jump," Shorty heard as he left.

This was Shorty's first time in church since a kid, but it was not his last.

On his trips to Korea Town to get a haircut or to see Wayne the Philosopher, Shorty timed it so he'd have time to sit in the church and not scare the caretaker.

His first prayer was a simple but courteous (courteous God is and courteous God likes; it was a rather good prayer), "Dear God, help Wayne the Philosopher, he needs it. Good day to you."

Note the transition from the natural, Wayne's need, to the divine. There is an acknowledgment that God is "dear" as in scarce, as in only, which is being truthful about God, which is very important in prayer. If your "dear" in addresses gets perfunctory, let them do so in your letters to the catalogue company who did not get your Christmas gift to your distant relative on time; let the "dear" in that letter get perfunctory if you must, but do not let the "dear" in your addresses to God get so. Shorty was starting out in prayer, and the first "dear" in prayer one would not presume to be perfunctory. Why would Shorty make the stop just to give God a perfunctory "hello"? - it makes no sense.

There is a blessing of God in wishing that He have a good day. Admittedly, theologians could argue whether God is capable of having a good "day," abiding as He does in eternity, and the prayer is theologically silent on just what goes into God having a good day. The fact of the matter is that Shorty, at this point, had read so little of Scripture, that he did not know what would cause God to have a good day, or a nice little "happening" within His eternity.

Washing the Egyptians ashore after they try to chase the Israelites through the narrow way of escape through the Red Sea - did God have a "good day" that day? The Scripture says that God "gave" the Egyptians for Israel, but did it "make His day"? The Scripture teaches that God would rather mercy have "its day" over judgment and that goes all around, or to be more specific, adding to Wayne the Philosopher's day in a way that wouldn't have been possible without a good prayer would in fact add a nice touch to God's day.

In what sense does God have a "day"? In a sense tied to relationship. The Lord and His bride have a relationship with a beginning, middle and no end. The Lord and His bride will have an anniversary. When the Lord interceded for the leper, the leper and the need were tied to a day, and this tied the Lord to that day, and future needs and future days as well. Time was a necessary creation because there had to be time to make appointments with grace.

But keep in mind that God made the day to start with and that He abides in eternity, which gets some into the issue of whether a day is in fact as an elephant in an elephant parade, elephants hanging onto each other trunk to tail (whether the elephants move or stand still is a separate question). The more important question of the day is the need in the day. Blessing God is more important than worrying about such matters as whether a day is as an elephant in an elephant parade.

This is to say that God would rather bless and not bring to the blackboard of life his eraser, which is to say his minus sign to

evil, that is judgment. We use "life" in the sense of what people do day to day, not in the sense of "life" as what results when you find the kingdom wherein God's life reigns, in the sense the gospel of John trumpets the "find it" kind of life worth having, the kind of life that does not need to go away because God is there also. We use "there also" while keeping in mind God is everywhere, everywhere except inside sin, if sin has an inside, considering that it just seems to spread.

While the Scripture does talk of God being everywhere, it does not mean that God gets inside of sin and drives it like a tank. One can't press these things too far. If your preacher teaches that God is so omnipotent and omnipresent that He must be inside of sin, driving it like a tank, well it is time to go down the street to another place that teaches the whole of the Book.

It does get difficult to talk about such things, which is why the Book is somewhat long, not too short, which bodes well for short prayers, prayers not so much explained as felt, particularly if you're just starting out.

In short, Shorty's first real prayer was a good prayer, a prayer with feeling, a prayer of blessing. It purposed to bless Wayne the Philosopher while also blessing God. It was there, I heard it. I enjoyed it.

Chapter 12

Shorty called Emily again the following week, and the following week. Their visits became regular. Emily was an expert on nice little nooks and crannies of some beauty in Los Angeles. They found much to talk about, including art.

Near LACMA, where they'd met, they'd walk down past the tar pits, through the shopping center to the little park behind that no one seems to even know exists. "You may find dinosaur bones down there, but rest assured that a ballerina didn't pop out of the bog. Evolutionists will teach you that if you propped a chair on the side, and sat there for a very, very, very long, time, you would see a ballerina pop right out of that bog. Nonsense," Emily explained.

They'd go to the Los Angeles Port and from the park, chat and watch them load the ships. They had high tea in Huntington Gardens.

They went to gangster movies. "Movies" plural but only two, not two or more. The first was a movie called "The General" set in Dublin. It was well reviewed by others but not Sister Emily, who wrote the editor of movie reviews her own thoughts on the film hoping that he might be more careful in the future.

Dear Mr. Entertainment Editor:

Re "The General"

Ad for leading actor must have read: Need male lead to play average man, super thief (management position), tragic hero. Irish are encouraged to apply. Can you create a sympathetic character from the following? You have extraordinary prowess and control over circumstances (till you die), don't cheat on your wife (except for incest with wife's sister), bring (stolen) toys home to your kids, don't drink excessively, like birds, disdain politics, give away some money to needy sympathizers in lieu of paying taxes yet have quite a lot left over, operate on communal basis where bandits rank and file get the same as management (sometimes anyway), mix with co-workers at the pool hall, know more about the law than your lawyer because you get to break into the law library after hours, get to park where you want to because everyone is afraid of you, get to explain why you steal from people and are entitled to hurt them, have controllable diabetes and get to inject yourself, and get harassed (even hit) by policemen who can't compete with your skills. Helpful supporting cast of co-robbers (one boozier who accidentally rapes child, one junkie, sundry "thugs" worse than you who are to make

you look good) plus two remarkably nonjudgmental sisters (who are to persuade the audience that your blue-collar common looks are attractive and that "them against us" is a workable life style) plus doting children with no character flaws. On the other hand, you do: steal, invade homes and take children's toys, cheat on your taxes, destroy jobs, blow up the car of the police lab worker, blow up the lab worker (partially), blow up other things, terrorize witnesses and jurors, cheat on welfare, stage phoney car accident to sue police, slander people, lie, curse incessantly, ascribe to Jesus things He did not do, and chastise remarkably loyal co-workers (Boozy and Dopey) with crucifixion and bullets in the knees. And if permitted to do so, rank and file might well have other complaints. While co-workers get after-torture drives to the emergency room (if they're innocent of robber-robbing), other benefits and safety precautions seem nonexistent. Bullet-proof vests are not provided. On really big jobs, management stays outside and only announces when it is quitting time. If you'll notice, rank has and takes it privileges. Management gets to torture, ransack homes of line workers, stays outside on big jobs, etc. Workers (Dopey in particular) may well want crucifixion during periodic management reviews to be brought to the bargaining (not pool) table. Workers (Boozey in particular) may well want to require managers who promise flesh wounds but smile and shoot you in the knee on purpose to be required to spend more time in counseling, if not more time on the practice range.

The actor who answered the ad did a remarkable job, but the job was selling humbug. The character's death in the end is repeated at the beginning of the movie and actually throughout. Was the hit man the IRA or an "old school" movie-goer?

The hero spends too much time justifying himself to be your typical existential hero. The foolishness on an exponential curve wouldn't be so bad if it weren't admixed with so much bad philosophy. He is supposed to have deep, profound philosophical insights as to why he is justified in stealing from other people and blowing up things and people, but he just pridefully thumbs his nose at people as he steals from them and blows them up (partially) - nothing new there.

What a humbug of a movie, the glorification of the incredibly stupid. Sharing some thoughts on "The General."

Sincerely,

Sister Emily Ebury
Address: The Old School

They mostly entertained themselves with their company and talk, although there was one other gangster movie. Shorty talked Emily into a Ralph Meeker as Mike Hammer movie, but that didn't get good reviews either. "Extortionist, existential, selfish, no help, hard boiled adult brat..." and on and on she went, as Emily tried to get Shorty to see Mike Hammer in a different light.

"Mike Hammer is as a man, less than a man, because he is only on paper, yet this little man on paper acts like a god, and tries to get others to emulate him. Yet he ... Jeremiah said something I want to read."

Pulling out her little Bed and Breakfast Bible, she turned and read: "`Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? said the Lord'... It's around here somewhere."

She continued reading: "`I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal."

"Who was Baal?," asked Shorty.

"A no good bum of a false god out on parolee but going back up the river because God isn't going to put up with this nonsense forever."

She continued reading, "`The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? said the Lord.'"

"What does that mean? What is chaff?," asked Shorty.

"Ah, here it is, chaff is like, well, Mike Hammer and other tough guys. No matter how tough you think you are, you can't even push over a flower once it comes to wish you a good day on your grave. Flowers on your grave can foreshadow the final resurrection day, acknowledging that the Lord will raise them up but that is grace, not works. The Lord will raise them up, else you believe in your ability to push up daisies from the coffin. All will be raised but not all toward the same end, but at either end, major exclamation points, the number of exclamation points you can't imagine."

"Everybody?"

"Everybody. The Bible says some are resurrected to be with Him,

and others are resurrected to be judged for their lack of repentance, resurrected to be judged on their own report cards. And everybody fails but the Lord. The Lord fulfilled the law, which is to say He showed it could be done but only He could do it. He busted the grading curve if you will."

"Here it is: `Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?' That's phrased like a question but a question you better not miss on the test paper. Salvation is like looking to the Lord's report card and wanting His grades. Else, you've got to deal with God's judgment when it comes like a hammer. God's word can be like a hammer that cracks a rock, yet so accurate, like a hammer would crack a walnut shell and leave a treat inside."

Things get complicated because foolishness tends to breed and multiply, and there was much of foolishness (foolishnesses in LA) that multiplied as it poured forth from Shorty's Mike Hammerish explanations of the world around him.

"Unbelief breeds books, but the glory of God also fills the libraries. The problem is to discern," Emily told him during one of their deep conversations. "In the Garden, all was good. In the latter chapters of Revelation, it is even better, all glorious. Jesus is described as the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, and the Beginning and the End is all good, all glorious. It is a false argument made by sin itself that says you could not know the light but for the dark. It is a false argument to say you can have no drama without conflict. When the angels watched the original creation, they shouted for joy, the Bible says. There was no conflict, no contrast, only the good, and that is the way it will end. But in the middle, we have to discern the truth, the light. It is confusing at times, trying to discern the true from the counterfeit, the light from the false light. But there is no alternative, we have to discern."

"By the person?"

"No, even smaller, you have to judge issue by issue within the person, even Corot, even me."

"Even you?"

They became good enough friends to talk frankly. Emily relayed the incident of her roommate surprising her. Like a little kid, her Mother of Many roommate jumped from behind the bedroom door and startled her one evening when she came in late and thought everyone was to bed.

"Son of a!," shrieked Emily, grabbing her mouth with one hand and her heart with the other. "Oh, my, you frightened me! Oh, my, please don't do that! Oh, forgive me, Lord, for using

that foul phrase!"

"I was just funnin' you," said the Mother of Many, wide-eyed at the phrase that came from Saintly Emily's mouth.

She explained to Shorty, "There was a time when I was rebellious, and one can hear much profanity on a military base if one listens. That phrase became a phrase of mine. I liked it. I adopted it in favor of others less foul, and others more foul. I liked the sound of it. I was good at it. It was my phrase. I've asked the Lord to take it from me, but it still pops out once in a while. It is like a string and that phrase is at the end."

It was a rather long confession about something Shorty wouldn't even bother to consider a cause for concern. "To this day, when someone cuts me off on the freeway, I may say that phrase. And I can't call someone who cuts me off on the freeway a son of a ... if I don't know it for a fact. And I don't want that phrase in my vocabulary anyway. 'Son of a gun,' Ah, that's just a euphemism for that foul phrase. I don't want to be legalistic but neither do I want to be calling people that like I did when I was a rebellious teenager. I'm afraid I'll blurt it out in front of the kids some day and then it will spread like wildfire among our kids and the kids in the entire mission, and it will get out that Sister Emily is teaching all the little children to say that."

Shorty thought it was odd, like him being a priest and hearing confession, but the confession came with a lamentation that wouldn't seem to stop.

"I don't even want to use that phrase in explaining to you my problem but I don't know how else to get the point across. St. Paul in his letter to Titus said to speak evil of no man, but in the same letter, he'd also said that a prophet among the Cretians had said of his own people that they were 'slow bellies,' lazy, gluttonous, over-eaters so lazy they could barely get forkful and handful up to their mouth, and that this was true, and therefore rebuke them sharply that they be sound in the faith. So sometimes you do have to get down to the facts and be specific about the problem, but the overall principle is to speak evil of no one. The Scripture also says there is a place to confess our faults to one another. I need help in this regard. Pray for me, will you, Shorty? I've cried out to God for help. I'd say, Lord, am I the Grand Canyon, why doesn't the wind of the Spirit just come along and blow off these imperfections? Why does it take so long? Pray for me, Shorty."

On his next visit to the big church on 6th, which he never shared with anyone, not even Emily, after a visit to see Wayne the Philosopher and give him some sneakers, he sat on the back pew

and interceded: "Dear God, I guess I do have an agenda today. In addition to Wayne the Philosopher - You've not forgotten about him I hope. I don't really see a lot of improvement in that area. Otherwise, it is a short list. Please help Sister Emily not call people....Well, I suppose you know what Sister Emily calls people who cut her off on the freeway. We don't want that getting all over the mission. Thanks. Good day to you, signing off, Shorty."

But then Shorty put a coda or addendum on his prayer: "My prayer presumed that You know what Emily calls people sometimes. But she says You forgive, and when you forgive, you forget. So if you've forgotten what Emily calls people sometimes, do you need that I... I presume not. But if you don't know what she calls them, and she doesn't want to call them that again, how can You help her not call them that again? I suppose You can...but I don't know how You can. Anyway, help Emily, thanks."

One might argue this is a prayer too long, a prayer that could have been better done. Yet it was a prayer that closed with an honest question that did not detract from the request. This was definitely the prayer of someone who had been in the company of Sister Emily.

Chapter 13

It seems an appropriate time to tell you more of the children at Emily's home. While only a tenant, Emily had much to do with the children. Her roommate had one natural child and three foster children, although the foster count varied, and she was mother to all who came, the Mother of Many. It was the Mother of Many who in a moment of lighthearted fun had triggered the awful phrase from Sister Emily.

And it seems an appropriate time to tell you of Shorty's relationship with the children and how it changed over time. Shorty was once called Brother Shorty at the mission he visited so much, a phrase that amused him no end, but he did not share it with anyone but Emily, regularly known at the mission as Sister Emily, sometimes Chaplain Emily, and by an older lady volunteer as Blessed One.

We start with Toots and two earlier incidents. Toots was the natural child of the Mother of Many.

At 2 p.m. on a Saturday, Shorty was at the LACMA gift shop inquiring whether they had a poster of Corot, "Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot" Shorty gave the gift shop attendant the full name. It was a delightful name, and Shorty enjoyed the sound of it, and he rather enjoyed giving out the name to the attendant. Perhaps that was a little prideful although I am not permitted a meter to measure such things, rather I am just supposed to help and share with you the incidents as they occurred.

The gift shop did not have such a poster and could not seem to find one to order anywhere. Shorty was disappointed, but there was another disappointment that turned the corner by 3 p.m. on the same Saturday when Emily delegated to him what was supposed to be a routine run to the hamburger stand.

Toots had been negotiating with the Mother of Many for a plastic toy at a fast food restaurant, a toy which per the radio's matter-of-fact announcement was in for the taking for small change. But the worker at the window announced, also very matter of factly, that it was not to be in for a week.

"Are you sure you don't have one of those little, what's it name?...Toots?," asked Shorty.

Toots had by then assessed the situation and resolved that the world that would misrepresent a two-bit toy to sell a four-bit scoop of fries was a world too cruel to endure without protest, and she'd set her little feet to the task of protest, harmless little feet usually, but now they were militant, like swords. With pointed-toe, boot-weapons at her disposal, Toots had set

about the destruction of Shorty's dash, his knobs, his right door, then the rib-cage protecting Shorty proper.

Ox, who was many times her bulk, had respected Shorty's authority as a parole officer, but Toots knew only her lack of toys. A puma mother can hoist an offending cub into mid-air by taking teeth to the nap of the neck but that wasn't an option. Physical coercion with a stick was not an option. Mace or pepper spray was not an option. Persuasion, friendly or otherwise, was wasted effort. To wait for her to grow up and act like this and get arrested and get her into the system was too long term. His car would not hold up, nor he. He was a hostage, trapped in his own little car, for the lack of the right tool for the right job, hostage for lack of a plastic toy. Even the Auto Club could not help. The only solution was to leave her with the hamburger vendor, who wouldn't take her, or hope that one hand to the wheel and one hand to a little girl arm pit would establish enough control of the situation till they got back to the mission. All options were bad, and to make matters worse, by the time they got back to the mission, Toots was calm and wasn't talking about anything but supper.

It would be nice to report that when Shorty visited, the children gathered around and crawled upon his lap, and his head, and played horsey off his leg, but it was not like that, although it would eventually get like that. Initially, Shorty's rapport with the children was slight, his relationship with them rather distant, the principal exception being the little boy, a foster-charge named Marvin, with whom he'd developed an "Ok sign" of communication that covered hello, goodbye, and just about everything in between. Marvin was a single foster, a child with no siblings. Atop Marvin's three foot frame were eyes, big and expressive, and round the corner from them were ears so big that ear muffs known to harsher climes would not fully muff them. Marvin's and his sister's immediate lineage was paternally a "Whir" (father was a sexual offender in Shorty's shorthand) and maternally a "Blur," which is to say the natural mother was on drugs.

Emily's advice to Shorty on getting along better with the kids was, "Sometimes, you just have to keep hanging around, staying with it, until something good happens."

Part of the problem was that Shorty was used to having his words respected. He could go up to Ox and say "come along," and Ox would come right along, almost every time. If there were problems, they could be major problems, lumps on your head or worse if a parolee got out of hand, but almost always, a parolee knew to behave. And it was not so with the kids.

Discipline was somewhat slack in the camp. And it rarely fell upon Shorty to have much of a directive influence on the kids,

but the occasion did come up, and when it did, his words were almost uniformly disregarded. And he seemingly had no recourse but disappointment. Certainly it was not his job to spank, and it was a little embarrassing snitching on a kid, although he learned to do it readily. But in all, Shorty was quite disappointed with the kids and their behavior, something akin to God in the Garden.

It was in this context in which you have to judge the fear that rose up in Shorty the Friday night he got the call.

"Shorty, it is Emily, as you know, this is the night of my big banquet, the Mayor will be there, and everything. I just sit and eat and wish I had you to talk to, but I absolutely have to go."

"Yes."

"Well, the Mother of Many is driving herself to the emergency room because of"

"The church is closed."

"What church?"

"I mean, is this a prayer request?" Shorty didn't have much conception of prayer outside of church, unless it was in a park.

"No, I didn't call to ask you to pray. I called to ask, can you help? Faith without works is dead, and I need some works."

"How, what?"

"Well, Shorty, I have to ask. Something I suspect but don't know. You've not been drinking or anything?"

"Not a thing, just got in." He put down his half-full, first beer of the night.

"I need you to babysit."

"You're kidding."

"I've called everyone. I have to go. I've called six people. I really need your help."

"How many? What's the count?"

"Same four, no new fosters."

Shorty put down the phone long enough to muse out loud, without amplification to the other ears, then it came out, "What's the bathroom situation?"

"What do you mean?"

"Can they all take care of their own bathroom business?"

"Yes," replied Emily into the speaker. Muffling the phone, she admitted to herself, as if that counted, "On a good night."

"How long?"

"No more than three hours."

"Well, Ok."

"You've got to come now. Can you come now."

"I'm on my way."

"Thanks."

Shorty came as he was. He brushed away the beer but added a mint just in case. He grabbed a set of files, muttering to himself, "This'll be a piece of cake. I'll take some work." Hope may spring up eternal but is rather often short lived, as it was in this case. "What have I gotten myself in for."

It was this occasion that triggered Shorty's first real heart-felt, long, out-of-church prayer to God. It began with "How could this be?," ended with "I really need your help." The prayer continued on the ride over and covered every shepherding problem he could think of that could affect a fold this small.

They met in the door way. Emily did not re-introduce Shorty to the children for lack of time. Emily was dressed as to a museum but hatless and gloveless. "You look lovely, Emily," Shorty assured her.

"This will have to be quick. They've been fed. They're dressed for bed but not ready for bed. You can't spank. This is the age of grace. The Mother of Many spanks, of course, even in the age of grace, judgment in measure to keep away from a hot pot that doesn't know judgment in measure. If there is a tantrum, ignore it - God usually does. Tantrums will die out, have faith. Just kind of keep 'em herded together and don't lose any of them."

"Don't lose any" was not a theoretical problem because Marvin had wandered off during nap time and was found several blocks away in a shopping area. This hadn't been shared with Shorty,

"I won't lose any, what shape we're all in when you get back is another issue."

"They were going to get a Bible lesson from the Mother of Many on

Matthew 5:37, "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." That's the King James - it just means let your `yes' be `yes,' mean it and do it. There's a Bible on book case, top shelf. `Pray hard and read the Bible a lot,' those are the guiding principles my parents left with me, my inheritance, my capital if you will, and although they did not give me assets to start out with, that inheritance has always served me well, and I commend that advice to you this night. I've started them out on the couch - they're all there. There are four. Do not lose any."

"I won't lose any."

"The Mother of Many may be back before me but don't count on it. When she goes to emergency, they give her a little something for the asthma, they usually keep her a few hours."

"What if they...?"

"Improvise - God will use you and your experiences to handle the situation and handle it well, if you're His. Trust that He will get you through it. You may even enjoy it, but I doubt it. It is a wonderful thing, the chance to teach the children. I once heard a testimony of a war hero, who for years was in a tiny place and tortured, and this tough Marine finally turned to the Lord, but all he knew was what he'd heard when he was a little kid in Sunday school, but that was enough. I've told the children they're to obey you but I wouldn't count on it. I absolutely have to go now."

The gathering on the couch consisted of: Toots, six; Marvin, the single foster of five, Alexandra the foster, seven; her twin-brother Aaron. The attire was pajamas, which was not only preparatory but intended to keep them indoors. Children attired in only pajamas are less likely to sneak outside to play for too long because of the cold. Shorty came in beret, and suit, not having had time to get out of it (the suit or the engagement). He sat in the big arm chair facing the sofa. Some diagnosticians of chair arrangements would say Shorty sat in the chair of authority. Some diagnosticians of leadership principles would say that Shorty should not have slouched over so much.

Shorty began, "Well?". It seemed a question but the children did not respond.

"What do you want to do?" Note this is a second question, poorly advised. God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of day in the Garden but it was only after giving them instructions, which they would eventually disregard, but generally it is not a good idea for the authority figure to begin a meeting with a bunch of children with a bunch of questions. God may ask questions but only after instruction. Recall Jonah - he was told to go to

Nineveh to preach but refused, ran away, got thrown off the ship. It was as if God called a meeting in the belly of the whale, and the meeting began: "Jonah, weren't we going to Nineveh?" Shorty had only heard of the story but he would understand it without having read it before the evening was out, which is to say, Shorty's babysitting was to be his belly-of-the-whale experience, as much for his instruction as it was to meet or instruct the children - although before this evening was over, as you will see, if you have eyes to see, or perhaps ears to hear, dear reader, God instructed both Shorty and the children.

"What would you like to do?"

"Huh" was all that arose from the conspirators on the couch.

The rebellion began slowly, one by one, somewhat like in the Garden - that story does get repeated if you'll notice.

But with Marvin's help, the gathering re-gathered on the couch and instruction began. Even without reading about Jonah, Shorty somehow knew that if things were ever going to get better, he'd better preach. Shorty got the Bible, read Matthew 5:37 and pondered how to approach his instruction to preach with his need to get the situation under some sort of control.

"This Bible lesson is going to come in two parts. Sister Emily is going to take me to church to hear the famous preacher, Pastor Jack Ambleard, and I hear that all famous preachers preach their sermons in three parts, they have three main parts, but since you're kids and I'm just starting out, we are only going to have two parts."

By this time, Shorty had long lost his beret, which lay in the hallway. The layout was basically kitchen to the back of the chair of authority facing the gang of four on the sofa, four conspirators if you will, except for Marvin who was some help. Around the corner was the hallway, and to your left was the first bedroom where Emily abode behind one locked door with a half-bath. Then down the hall to the left was another bedroom, and to the right was the master bedroom, and in between was the only full bathroom (full in the sense of facilities, full in the sense of use in a house so full). In a child's world, bedrooms and bathrooms and half-baths also serve as hiding places, as Shorty learned before this second gathering on the couch.

"First point. I'm going to tell you a story, but before I do I'm going to tell you a principle. Well, we'll start with the Scripture. The Scripture says, 'Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no," all else is evil.' Not what does that mean?" Shorty was inexperienced and still allowed questions to come up before the instruction, which is not the order of things.

"We don't know," said Toots.

"Well, let's start one point farther back. Before we deal with what you say, let's deal with what you say in relation to what I say. You are supposed to agree with what I say. If someone says to you, Shorty says to you do `so and so', and I say to you, do the opposite of `so and so', you are to do what I Shorty tell you to do, and not what So-and-So tells you to do."

This is the "You'll have no gods before Me" part of the ten commandments - which every parent or tag-parent has grafted into the honor your parents commandment. The children were having their Mount Sinai experience.

"We're to do what Shorty tells us to do," said Marvin.

"Says you," said Toots.

"Says you," said Alexandra looking for support from her twin brother, who was still silently assessing the situation.

"You're even to say what I tell you to say."

"Why?," came the question from the two girls on the couch.

"The principle we're going to establish with the little story I am going to tell you before the evening is over is that you have to be reliable. If you do what you say, people will rely on you. They will do `so and so' if you tell them you will do `so and so', but they have to know you will do what you say you will do, or else they will not do `so and so' to start with."

"I got lost at the second `so and so,'" said Aaron.

"You've got to be reliable. Your mother has to be able to rely on you. When you tell her you're going to do `so and so'..."

"More `so and so's," said Aaron.

"When you tell your mother you're going to do something, you've got to do it later so your mother can predict prior thereto that you're going to do something that will be consistent with the whole plan."

"This seems complicated," said Toots, but her interest was getting perked.

"You've got to be reliable, else you can't work. That's the point of the little story I'm going to tell you. First we state the principle, then we follow it up with illustration."

"Kids don't work, we don't have jobs," objected Toots, looking

for loopholes.

"You don't know nothing. Everybody knows, every adult knows, that a kid's work consists of two things, looking cute and playing."

Puzzled looks arose from all corners of the sofa and areas in between, but Shorty had somehow, miraculously, captured the attention of his audience. It may have been a minor miracle. The Scripture does not explain just how Jonah captured the attention of the Ninevites once he finally repented and went to Nineveh to preach, but once he got there, they listened; they repented, just like Jonah. But how Jonah got their attention once He got to Nineveh and just why the Ninevites repented once Jonah preached to them - well, once you think about, the Bible does not explain everything. God does not necessarily reveal all His secrets. And one of the secrets which is still a mystery to even me is just how the children got so attentive and something in their little hearts (bless 'em) had begun to open about this time. I can usually spot a miracle when I see one, and this may well be one. But miracle or mystery or both, Shorty got their attention.

"Two grown women in the house, there's gotta be a fairly good sized mirror around but one that is mobile, even I know that. Excuse me, kids, I'll be right back." Shorty returned to find all conspirators and Marvin still in one place. He'd not lost any, but there was a brief challenge at that time, one he'd not expected.

There had been one brief challenge to his authority that arose almost instantly. Toots had played her best card right from the get go, but she overplayed her hand because Shorty had been instructed in how to handle such an emergency and said instruction had come within minutes of the incident, the incident being that Toots proceeded to the hall, and threw a tantrum at the spot where Shorty's beret now lay. Shorty folded his arms, watched, occasionally turning the corner to watch the other three. The tantrum passed with a little help.

"Those ringlets in your hair. I wonder if they indicate the little twists and turns that go on in your little tantrum-throwing mind. If we got a wet wash cloth, and tried to straighten them out, I wonder if that would straighten out the inside." The sight of Shorty coming from the bathroom with a wet wash cloth, the footsteps of judgment in short stride, were enough to get her up. Shorty had successfully maneuvered past his first crisis.

The second major challenge to his authority came from Aaron. There had been a sort of group challenge to his authority in the form of a general dispersion, a diaspora of children if you will,

if we see the couch as the Promised Land. But the children were in their pajamas and couldn't go out and were soon gathered again in one place, the designated place, the sofa (the Promised Land), for instruction. Thus ended the second major challenge to Shorty's authority. You'll remember the first challenge was Toots' tantrum, and the next major challenge, from Aaron, is about to be explained.

"You're not married but you're trying to be our Daddy tonight. How can you assume the Daddy role and not be one? Show me your license to be my Daddy and I'll do what you say, else I figure you as a second-stringer, a poor excuse no-Daddy, a short..."

"Enough," said Shorty. "Now you obey Emily don't you, and she's not a Mom, right?"

"That's different," was the brief, lawyerly reply.

"Our foster Mom, Janet, says you are a permanent bachelor, you do not have any idea of ever getting married, and if you did, you're too ugly to ever get a wife, and she doesn't even understand why Emily wants you to be her friend."

"Well, in the Middle Ages, really religious people used to go out in the desert and pray. I can see the sign post, "Desert, only really religious people, no kids allowed." Emily was telling me. They'd climb up on a pole and pray in the desert. They're called hermit poles. I've never gotten married because I was too busy being a hermit. Being a hermit is hard work, takes years to work your way up. I still have my hermit pole. It is out around Palms Springs, but I've been so busy lately, I only get there on weekends. Well, it is actually a time-share."

"What?," said Aaron, the spokesman of conspirators, the future lawyer, "what a puny whatcha call it to my question. Who ever heard of a whatcha call it..."

"A hermit, " Shorty filled in.

"...as a babysitter? Are you up to it?"

"You've got to admit, he may make 'em up, but he's got some stories," said Alexandra, "better than our last foster Daddy."

"But the point you made about my not being very good looking is well taken, and in fact going to be the main point that we're going to get to. Now a kid's job, and a kid's got two jobs, but the first one we're going to deal with is being cute. A kid's job is to be cute. It's in the job description. You're not cute as a kid, you're out of work. Kids are cute, black kids, and brown kids, and yellow kids, and green kids, and foster kids, and American Indian kids, and way-over-there Indian kids, and kids

all over the world, scientists agree, and scientists agree on almost nothin' else, and what they agree on is that kids are cute. It is in the job description. Anyone disagree." There was silence.

"We agree," said Aaron. "Kids are cute."

"We're gonna go through this one by one, girls first, youngest to oldest, in that order." And kid by kid, Shorty took them to his lap, one by one, showing the child his or her own picture in the mirror, and then shortly jerking the mirror to his own, admittedly, not cute face. The response of the kids was marked, even emotional. All agreed the contrast was striking.

"Now I'm going to tell you something, something I've not admitted to anyone else, and that is how I got so ugly. This radish nose."

"What's a radish?," asked Toots.

"It looks like this nose but its got a prettier color," said Shorty. "A radish is a pretty thing compared to this nose."

"Yuk," said Marvin.

"I've never told anyone how I got this ugly, but I'm gonna tell you. It will be our secret. You can't tell anybody. Agreed?"

"Agreed?," was the response, each child verbally responding in sequence as Shorty required. Marvin got cold, then another, then another. There were a series of breaks as each child went and got a stocking cap. Each sat attentively, in pajamas and stocking caps.

"I was just a little older than the oldest of you. And I'd say one thing and then just do the opposite. I'd tell my mother I was going to the corner, and I'd go blocks away. I'd tell my mother I'd stay in the driveway, and I'd go play in the street. And one day, I was just no longer cute. I was in fact as you see me this day, only smaller."

"No!," said Aaron in disbelief.

"Only believe, 'the just shall walk by faith,' I've heard Emily say it many times. It is on a plaque on the mission church wall, right along the plaque that simply says 'Others.' If you don't do what you say, if you're not good, you're gonna be out of work, you're not going to be cute anymore."

"Naw," said Alexandra.

"Naw," said Aaron, then Toots. Marvin thought about it.

"If you don't do what you say you're going to do, if you're unreliable, you lose your job. You can't be cute anymore."

"Aren't there nice looking big people who have lied at some time?" asked Aaron.

"Well, it can happen any time, any day, sometimes the effect is down the road. That's the terrible part, worrying about when?"

"Huh, I don't know," said Alexandra.

"Emily told me St. Paul said, thinking kindly of God's grace, that the law came along and killed him. I don't fully understand all that. With me, I just got ugly, that I'm sure about. I've seen the pictures. I was a cute kid, then one day, well, you can see for yourself."

"Naw," said Aaron.

"If you don't do what you say you're going to do, if your `yes' doesn't mean `yes' when you say it, if your `no' doesn't mean `no' when you say, you'll lose your job as a kid, you won't be cute."

"We'll look like Shorty," said Marvin, grimacing, too young to know what grimacing is, doing it none the less, rather like the swallows getting back to Capistrano without knowing how they do it. If Adam had a hard task naming all the animals in the Garden, it may be even harder coming up with all the names for things kids do, if you had to start from scratch.

"Now we're going to the second part of the sermon, Sermon, Part II, the `Snatching of Bookie Bob.' I'm going to tell you the story of the `Snatching of Bookie Bob.'"

"What's the first word mean?," asked Toots.

"Kidnapping, they kidnapped Bob, took him by force and made him pay to get himself free again."

"What's a bookie?," asked Alexandra.

"A no-good gambler, someone who puts good things, good money at risk of being lost, just to get more money in return, without giving anything in return. No-goodniks, standing toe to toe, trying to get something from the other without being any help whatsoever but without hitting the other fella, that's two gamblers when they play by the rules, which doesn't last long if you leave two gamblers alone. It is bad but done all the time. A bookie is in the business of making the gambling wheels go round but he may not own the wheel."

"What's that?," asked Toots.

"You don't need to understand everything, just listen to the main point."

"Get to the story," urged Aaron.

"Well, two no-good gamblers need money, and they figure the bookie makes so much money that they'll just take his. So they kidnap him, and force him to make his friend go get money to pay them, else they won't let him go. But it takes Bookie Bob's friend some good time to round up the money, but by the time they money gets there, Bookie Bob and these two, no-good gamblers, have been gambling for so long that they owe Bookie Bob all the money when it gets there. So here comes the ransom money, they turn Bookie Bob loose because he paid the ransom, but then they turn over the money to Bookie Bob because they've got to keep their word. A gambler's word has to be kept in gambling circles, else he can't work. He can't do what he does. Even people who do bad things know that you've got to keep your word there, else you can't do your work, even though your work is doing bad things. Bad can't even be around other bad for too long, it gets kicked out."

"I'm a little lost," said Toots.

Aaron explained. "A gambler can't gamble unless the people who talk with him know he'll pay back. He can't do what he does unless other people believe him."

"Right."

"Now a kid's job, their main job, after being cute, which is just natural, is play and doing their homework and going to school, when they're old enough. But our point tonight, and it is well into the night, I hope Emily is back soon, but our point tonight is that a kid's work is play. Anybody disagree with that.

"A kid's work is play," said the girls in order of age, then the boys, all articulating the principle as Shorty required.

"A kid's work is child's play. It is in the job description. Now how do we apply the principle we learned from 'The Snatching of Bookie Bob' to you kids? How do we drive the point home, here, into this home?"

"How?," said Aaron.

"You don't work if you don't keep your word. A kid's job is play. A kid don't get to play if he don't keep his word," said Marvin.

"You got it, Marvin, that was very good. If we had stickers, I understand kids get stickers for doing good things, you'd get a sticker. A kid's work is play, do what you say or you're out of a job. Be good, full employment, play outside and inside; be bad, recession, out of a job, go to your room. So if you tell me you're going to play in the driveway and I look out and you're playing in the street, what?" The sermon delivered, it was time for questions. "If I stick my head out the door, what am I going to say? What does your Mom say?"

"What are you doing playing in the street when you told me you'd play in the driveway?," said Toots.

"I catch you playing in the street, I'll just say, 'Hey, kid, you're out of a job. Your job is play but you're out of a job. Get to your room.'"

"Off to your room, no play," said Toots.

"Just like Mom," said Alexandra. "Adults get to the same place somehow but they do it in many different ways."

"Just she didn't explain it, not this good," said Marvin.

"And we know that...", said Toots.

"From the story 'The Snatching of Bookie Bob,'" said Aaron.

"We know it from Scripture," but Damon Runyon wrote a story to illustrate it, the story being 'The Snatching of Bookie Bob.'"

"And he wrote the story so adults could explain to their kids how they have to play in the driveway if they say they're gonna play in the driveway," said Toots.

"Or else they're out of a job," said Shorty.

"Do what you say, get to play, otherwise, kid, you're out of a job," said Shorty, who then required each child to repeat it in sequence then the children to repeat it in unison.

And that is how Shorty did a Bible teaching on "Let your 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no,'" based in substantial part on the Damon Runyon short story called "The Snatching of Bookie Bob."

Shorty was new to such things and his stories being grounded mostly in Mike Hammer stories and Damon Runyon stories and the like, you can perhaps understand how this was the best he could do.

Before the evening was over, Shorty noticed the reminder Emily had on the refrigerator door. It was typed but obviously

Emily's. At the top, it read: "Live and do not die!" Under this, there were typed out four Scriptures.

"And this is life eternal, that they may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John 17:3.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:9.

"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil." Deut. 30:15.

"...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live". Deut. 30:19.

Before the evening was over, the kids had Runyonesque nicknames. Toots became "No Shoes," because Shorty preferred her unbooted. Alexandra became "Crumbs" for same so often on cheeks. Aaron became "Mouthpiece," anticipating he would be the lawyer as he was already the main spokesman. And Marvin became "Small Change" because he always seemed to hold on to money.

When Emily and then the Mother of Many came home to the explanations of the children of how the evening went, the result was pretty much undecipherable. Shorty's explanation was, "Conditions never went to a full lock down." Shorty left the children with a mere, "Stay cute, kids."

There was a time during the following week, when one of the children disobeyed, then burst into tears, "I don't want to be ugly, like Shorty, I'm sorry."

But all and all, it was a successful evening. Crises were gotten through. Authority was reestablished on a scale sufficient for law and order and grace to get a bachelor through an evening with four kids. Four different singularities of childhood coming together under one roof used to the common restraint of single motherhood were exposed to the inexperienced hands of bachelorhood, and vice versa, and all survived. The Bible got taught. Banquets and mayor's speeches went from future dreads to forgotten past. I did not hear the Mayor's speech but heard of it, and am inclined to judge that the children learned more from Shorty's explanation of the "Snatching of Bookie Bob," in a Biblical context, of course.

Yet Shorty suspected that, if there was a rematch, it would be better for the children to be read stories from those more experienced in such matters, so he began a round-up of children's books, just in case. His favorite, one that passed inspection from Emily and the Mother of Many, was called Penelope and The

Principal of All the Principals. It read then and still reads now, as follows:

The main principle of the School Principal was that the principal reason for goin' to school was to learn who is who. Then you needed to know what is what.

So for starters, by that we mean to begin with, he figured the students should know who is who at the school. Specifically that they should remember his name, which was Rupert, Mr. Rupert, or most specifically Principal Rupert.

And they should know why he was called Principal.

Mr. Rupert was called "Principal Rupert" because "principal" means chief. As the chief or main one at the school, it was the Principal's job to lay down the law - or principles. That's to say, a Principal's job is to make sure students know the principles that will make them a success at school, and home, on the playground, and all around town - all the way to heaven even.

As Principal Rupert saw it and explained it to anyone who asked .. or didn't ask, the Principal was the Lawgiver - the one who chose the principles that the students would learn and put into practice.

The Principal gave out the principles. "The Principal's job is to know the right principles and pass them on to the teachers who pass them on to the kids."

To let Principal Rupert know you knew his name, he liked to hear it in his ears.

"Hello, Principal Rupert" was the preferred greeting for a student or teacher. Rarely would a teacher be so presumptuous as to drop "Principal" from Principal Rupert's name. "Hello, Principal Rupert" in his ears let Principal Rupert know that the speaker knew who was who.

But even after you know who is who, the next question is what is what.

"What's what?," Principal Rupert would often quiz his students, although the students were not his, because he was the Principal. If they were anybody's ... at the school anyway, they belonged to the teacher.

"What's what?, Penelope," quizzed Principal Rupert.

"I don't know what is what, I'm still working on who is who, Principal Rupert," said not-so-little Penelope, on her way to science class.

"If I drew a chart, up and down and sideways, Mr...or rather Principal Rupert, would there be anybody above you, or are you as high as it goes? Is there a Principal over the Principal, Principal Rupert, sir, and if so, is he a he or is she a she, and why, and do things ever go side to side when it comes to Principals on a chart?"

"There is nothing sideways when it comes to Principals at the school, although sideways comes in when you have more than one school. I have "peers" - other Principals at other schools. To locate us on a chart of many schools, you'd have to look side to side because we're all equals, or equal - which is to say we've got the same job but at different schools."

"But is there a Principal of Principals?, and if so how many?, and how do you get that job?," asked Penelope, as purely and precisely as you please.

Penelope was trying to figure out the big picture, or the big puzzle and how the pieces fit together. She was also trying to figure out if the Principal was God at the School.

"God gives out the principles and writes them in a book," Penelope explained and then she continued, pausing only to put her hand to her brow. "And if that is God's job, Principal Rupert, how did you get the job of laying down the law at schools?"

"The Principal is not God. Only God is God. That's one principle your Sunday School teacher has surely taught you."

"But if she gives out the principles and she got them from God, and that's the way it works at church ... on Sundays, and if the teachers give us your laws on Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday and Friday, here at school, well, since they get their principles from you, then aren't you God?"

"The less is blessed of the better," said Principal Rupert, "meaning those just getting started learn from those who've had more time to learn their principles. But no, oh, no, I'm not God, Penelope - only God is God."

"Is there a Principal of Principals then?"

"Yes."

"Is the Principal of Principals down the hall, or up the stairs, and why don't we ever see the office of the Principal of Principals?"

"It is more like the Principal of Principals is upstairs, but the stairs are not really stairs you can see. See?"

"I can't go see the Principal of Principals?"

"His office is in heaven," Principal Rupert explained, "so you can't go see Him, ever, unless you get a hundred on all your tests - although you can ask Him questions."

"I'd rather start with asking you a question?"

"The Principal usually asks the questions, but OK - ask."

"Does the Principal of Principals ask you questions, and does He grade hard?"

"Yes, and He grades so hard, you wouldn't believe it although you have to believe...really. He grades so hard you have to get a hundred on every test every day, for all the days in a row, forever and ever."

"Who can do that? Can you do that?"

"Well, nobody and no," admitted Principal Rupert, scratching his head.

"Does the Principal of Principals get a hundred on every test every day, for all the days in a row, forever and ever?"

"Yes."

"Then He must be Jesus," said Penelope.

"Yes," said Principal Rupert.

"But if he grades hard..."

Interrupting people isn't so nice, but Principal Rupert felt he had to interrupt Penelope. "You can't get to heaven unless you get a hundred on every test every day, for all the days in a row, forever and ever. That's the main principle - of what they call the Old Testament."

"And the New Testament?" asked Penelope.

"The main principle of it is that you can have the report card of the Principal of Principals - if you want it."

"I see. I like that," said Penelope.

Principal Rupert could be a little long-winded at times and he knew it, and he tried to speak short sentences to children who were themselves short. But as he thought about it, he just didn't see how he could make the following sentence any shorter.

"The less is blessed of the better, or the little ones are blessed of God, whose main principle is that you have to get all your principles right, all the time, get a hundred on every test every day, for all the days in a row, forever and ever - and if you can't, well, the principal principle to know is that Jesus made a hundred on all His tests, and He is the Principal of Principals, and you can have His report card if you ask."

"I can have His report card?"

"Yes, that's the Good News," said Principal Rupert, shortly.

"But I still have to study?"

"Yes."

"I was afraid of that," said Penelope, pondering, as she was off to her science class. But the more she pondered, the more she liked the idea that in the end, she could have the report card of the Principal of Principals. She really liked that idea.

The science teacher had a really hard test that day, and the students all knew it. Only Penelope smiled, and the science teacher wondered why. A student might smile after a hard test if the student knew the answers, but why would any student smile going into class to take a hard test?

So after the test, Mr. Harvey, the science teacher, asked Penelope why she smiled on the day of such a hard test. Then Penelope explained to Mr. Harvey that there was after all and above all, a Principal of Principals.

"In the end, when you've done your best, you can still ask Him for His report card. It is nice to know what is what ... especially for a science test, but it is even more important to know who is who, and it is especially important to know the Principal of all the Principals... and to ask Him if you can use his report card when it really counts."

Mr. Harvey was so puzzled at the answer that he didn't even know the right question to ask. He knew a lot about what is what but he didn't know as much about who is who, or rather Who is Who when you are talking about the Principal of all the Principals. Seeing his bewilderment, Penelope told her teacher to go to the Principal's office.

"Go ask Principal Rupert. He can explain."

Sending her science teacher to the Principal's office pleased Penelope so much that it was hard work not to laugh out loud.

So Mr. Harvey, that very day, at Penelope's suggestion, was off

to the Principal's office to find out about the Principal of all the Principals.

"The less is blessed of the better," thought Penelope, "and often times that may mean us shorter kids are taught by the taller and wiser adults ... but not always. It seems I learned about the Principal of all the Principals before my science teacher."

Chapter 14

It was something Shorty had given a good deal of thought to before the day he and Emily were at the museum, strolling the Impressionist section together, mostly silently. Shorty simply reached over and took her hand. Emily smiled, merely put it back, and strolled on. Nothing was said. Nothing was ever said. The topics stayed with art, and case loads, and kids, and park topics, which is to say everything under the sun.

Shorty's nose did not work. It was not only unpretty, it did not work at all. It was not a matter of hayfever season or other season. All year long, Shorty's nose did not work. The day at the museum with Emily, the day in which she would not take his hand, had been preceded by a day at Macy's men's counter at the Beverly Center. Shorty had bought himself what he thought was the only cologne he ever owned. He rarely talked to himself while shaving, but shared that thought with the man in the mirror one morning as he stood on the stool that took him to mid-mirror. "I don't remember ever having any sprinkle yourself cologne, maybe it is time." His mother had bought him a box of cologne and hand care lotion one Christmas when he was a teen, along with a gift pack of nail clippers and other instruments of trimming and fine tuning, one of which, the nose hair clippers, was most painful. Only the nail clippers really got any use and were still around. The other gifts had been discarded long ago. That day at Macy's had been a nervous day, one of "I don't know," and "How do I know?" and "I can't smell a thing," and "Whatever," and "What do you think?," and "That much?," and many short phrases. But he bought himself a nice bottle of cologne, one that cost more than a day's visit by Angel.

After the day at the museum with Emily, the day in which she would not take his hand, he tried to return the bottle of cologne. But the bottle having been opened and the seal broken, the sales lady, a tiny little Filipino lady, pretty as could be, nice as she was and as courteous as she was, she would not take back the cologne. He went back to Macy's the next day, but found the same sales lady on duty. He came back another day, but another sales lady, as nice as could be, as pretty and petite as could be, could not and would not take back the expensive bottle of cologne. He took the cologne to another Macy's, but he could not get them to take it back.

The Song of Solomon is not a song of natural love, else there would not be the joy among the women, who would normally compete for the scarcity of the Bridegroom's attention. There is much of such competition in Genesis. But in Song of Solomon, the Bridegroom is freely shared. Yet there is an exclusivity to the covenant of affection and fellowship; "Set me as a seal upon thy heart..." it reads.

As a natural man, Shorty's attention would be a limited resource and his affection would have to be rationed. However, in the economy of natural love, the problem of the allocation of this scarce (short) resource never came up. This little Shorty stayed home (or went to the gambling houses), never went to market. Shorty had had dates in school but never a girlfriend. The competition for Shorty's attentions was nonexistent. The history of the competition for Shorty's affections was not to be written.

After Emily would not take his hand, he projected a future like his past and presume he would never have any use for the bottle of expensive perfume. He seemed more distressed as his loss over the bottle of cologne than with his attempt to hold Emily's hand. He'd always been pessimistic about the latter, but somehow expected better of Macy's. Yet even with Macy's, if the seal is broken, it is broken and not to be returned.

Chapter 15

Shorty had short-descriptions of his cases. He used "Whir" to describe sexual offenders, "Glitch" to describe both theft and mental illness, "Bang" for violent crimes, and "Blur" for liquor and drug related crimes.

Emily and Shorty had a common case in Ox, or in the case of Emily, Ox and his wife. Their discussions were usually short on these topics. They didn't discuss business much on their days off, their "days without verbs" as Emily called them. They agreed Ox was a "Glitch," some history of theft, perhaps something of a mental deficiency if not illness, but not really a fearful sort of guy, not a "Bang," and not a "Blur." These terms drifted over to Emily's vocabulary. Some of Shorty's vocabulary ceased to exist, with Emily or at home, or even on the golf course, if you can believe that.

It is time we drift back a bit and tell you about Ox's wife, and how she came to know Emily before she brought her husband to Emily's meeting.

The heart of significance is the particular heart. Ox's wife, Olive, had been a go-go dancer and more while Ox was in jail, heavy, burdensome sin such that voices came in her head bringing a fear of tomorrow even worse than today, fear on an exponential curve, with the result that someone found her crying on a park bench and brought her to Emily.

Kindness and caring and compassion and caresses, Emily would compass about the needy with these and other needful things. A reputation is an important thing, and Emily was reputed for wherewithal and time and patience to help the most needy, particularly those crying out from the tragedies playing night and day, over and over again, within the little pockets of darkness in the soul, tragedies of battles without victories or end until the victory of the cross is brought to bear. A "sac" is internal with fluids, insubstantial, but holding the fluids in, while a "sack" is external, more substantial, yet often breaking with an overload of mere vegetables in cans. When the invisible heart "sac" breaks for weight of sadness, when the water breaks as in a birthing, where does one go? "Take her to Emily," was the remedy proposed by the someone who found Olive alone, crying on a park bench, someone who'd been a "missionary" in the sense of having come to the mission for help some years past.

After some brief explanations, Emily greeted Olive as a mother might greet a prodigal daughter, with many questions.

"What is your name, young lady? Why do you cry so much? Did

God lose you? Did the beacon light get so fogged in even God couldn't see out? The one who formed the eye, can He not see? Did you change your name and God couldn't find you any more?"

"Olive," and "I don't know," were admixed with the questions, most of which were asked to be understood rather than answered.

"You've heard of the parable of the prodigal son, the child who went and squandered, then came home to be greeted by a father, a heavenly Father really, who ran to greet him. The father ran to greet, but you'll notice he never left home. The Father stays in the kingdom of righteousness, waiting for the children to come home. He has not lost you. He was just waiting for you, child."

Emily's first prayer for Olive began shortly thereafter, in the middle of a tearful homecoming:

"Father God, Righteous Father, Healer, Physician of the soul, I intercede for my sister, Olive, your daughter. Lord, your Scripture in Zechariah says the Lord will return, come again upon the Mount of Olives. Lord, give us a preview. Bring your presence upon this Olive this day. The light is so dim in her, Lord, like it is about to go out. The prideful come as flashing neon but are as bulbs half lit, but Olive comes to You with a contrite spirit, humbling herself to the glory of the Son. The Scriptures say He is the brightness of your glory. Fill her with your light, fill her with the light that cannot be contained, fill her with the choicest wheat, the choicest of treasures, fill her with the love and presence of your Son."

"Pour out your Spirit. Pour in the oil and the wine. Lord, I pray you immerse her in your Spirit, so that she will be missed; she will be conspicuous by her absence because your Spirit is there when she is there. Make her soul as a well watered garden that the Son may come into his garden, as it says in the Song of Songs. Make her soul a well watered garden, a place of beauty, a place of communion with God, as in the Garden before the fall. Lord, your Spirit breaks forth in different ways in each life, and I delight at the prospect of the surprises that we will see as You work in her life, and the certainty of the righteousness that will result as you conform her to the image of your dear Son."

"Father, in the natural, the toddler peaks at a maturity that downturns into death. Not so in your Spirit. The eternal comes in for life when your Spirit is invited into the learning process. As we will see your Spiritual strength peaking and peaking and peaking in this woman, we will count it a foretaste that your Son has truly conquered death, and His life is at work in her. Trace your divine nature onto her soul. As she reads the Scriptures, imprint the Son upon her. There is no unrighteousness in your Son. He is called `Jesus Christ the

righteous...' He had no fabric of unrighteousness with which to make a garment of sin. His walk was a seamless garment of righteousness before You, Father."

"I pray your Spirit knit up the garment of her personality, and make it unique, a pleasing place for your habitation, a place with no intruders. You give us little pleasures in the personalities of our brothers and sisters, little decorations and revelations that you put for us in their souls, that we have You in common. Your Scripture says the parched ground will be like a pool; begin with Olive. Spring up in Olive something of beauty for all of us. As the king in the Song of Solomon drew the beautiful Shulamite into his chambers, I ask you to bring her into your chambers and give her garments fit for Your company."

"Her mind is a museum of her worst experiences but You can close it down, not for renovations but for a new museum. You birth again, you make us new creations, you start with a fresh canvas that You only, Artist Jesus, can paint upon."

"Unforgiveness can be like old dry paint, Lord, and we don't want any of the old art work. Help her to forgive others who have tried to paint their image in her soul. Hoots and cries by bar flies, images from a past that has passed. Thank you, Lord. Create Your image within her and guard this work oh so carefully."

"Make her soul joyful as you clothe her with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness, these inseparable garments spoken of by Isaiah. There is no different hanger upon which hangs the garment of salvation and the garment of righteousness. The Son's righteousness is also the garment of salvation, but it must be slipped into by faith, accepted as a gift. Keep her heart pure by gift, for when we try to brush our own garments, we just get them dirty again. You are the Dyer expert in coloring and beautifying the garments; give her garments so beautiful she will draw others to You."

"I would not pray upon her another's garments. She may have coveted the gifts and the looks of others more pretty than she. It is a rebellion and hard labor, a never ending adjusting that never comes out right, when we try to be others, and not seek the person You would have us be. I ask you to beautify and quieten her spirit, and make her happy with You and the brush strokes you have for her life, unique."

"The Song says about the king: 'He brought me to the banqueting house,' literally the house of wines, 'and his banner over me was love.' It is our family heritage, by the new birth, to gather around the ensign of the Father's house, the banner known as love, exclusive, not tainted by the impure. Pour in the wine, as well as the oil. I look forward to seeing something of the

finished work as you continue to work on dear Olive, whom you have so graciously brought into my life."

"Father, as the dove left the ark and came back with an olive branch, a token from dry land that speaks of judgment that has passed, so I count this Olive as having been gathered in by the heavenly dove, the Holy Spirit, and this salvation as evidence that your judgment has passed."

"Father, the Scriptures say the sun is a symbol of your love and blessing because it bursts forth in all directions. The Lord is the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings prophesied from the Old Testament. There is none of us that come to You perfectly whole. We need protection from the sun. The Shulamite in the Song of Songs had been hurt by the sun. That protection is also the Lord. The Scriptures say the Lord is our sun and shield. He is the righteousness of the law and can write the law in our hearts. He is also grace and truth. Father, I pray the person of the Son, the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings, so burst forth in this life that she won't even recognize herself some day, You will heal her and change her so."

"Father, I pray you'll give her wisdom, as Paul prayed in Ephesians."

She began reading, changing the Scripture only to tailor it as a prayer for the person in need. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. That the eyes of your understanding be enlightened, that you may know, Olive, what is the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power. Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. Far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all."

Putting down the Bible and finishing her prayer, "Sweep her clean, fill her with Yourself. You were betrayed but you do not betray. You are the source of all good. Establish fellowship with trust, first with You, then others. By your grace leave wisdom in residence. Thank you, Jesus. Father, I'm confident that as your Scripture says, having begun a good work in her, you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

On another occasion, she read from Isaiah: "`Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength..." Then

she prayed, "Lord, we ask you to fill her longings with your Presence. We ask You to fill the silence as she steadies her heart before You."

On another occasion, she prayed Psalm 23, particularly "He restoreth my soul..."

Does kindness taste like cream? Does it taste like honey? Does it taste like a chocolate chip cookie? A need satisfied has a taste of its own. A dire need met has a taste that is indescribable. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" says the psalmist. There were prayers, times together, and after some months and many prayers, the voices stopped.

The prayers and talks took place in and out of church, during service, before and after a service, walking the grounds, at Olive's home, in Emily's car, and on all days of the week. There is no valid argument against such kindness. Serial arguments. One can argue first, to be countered by an opponent, that to be rebutted, and on and on, a series of arguments on a point. Or arguments in search of a point?

The pharisees mounted a series of arguments against the kindness of healing on the sabbath. The Son led the pharisees back to the Scriptures but did not so much argue the point but defined the point, in revealing that He is Lord of the sabbath. The arguments sought to find a chain, but the chain was broken in the revelation of the Lord of the sabbath. Belief in the revelation breaks the chain of argument, and the voices stopped.

Chapter 16

It was some six months after his first and only babysitting assignment that Emily agreed to come to his apartment for dinner and a short walk to a concert at the Music Center. Shorty was a better cook than she. On the elevator ride up, he got to show her his knuckle-to-the-elevator-button trick, his athletic skills with things behind his back.

She drove herself, came with lipstick, indicative of a special occasion, dressed somewhere between museum (all out) and the park (mostly work).

A small group of words came together and became their common vocabulary, and their's alone, and one such group of words came together that night as they watched part of a Western movie, before the Chopin concert. Emily liked Chopin, and still talked about the Martha Argerich concert she'd heard years before at the Music Center.

The group of words that arose from a cowboy movie to be applied to the hurry-up, slow-down style of management was the term "Whoa-Ha." The coach driver goes furiously through the dust and the water and anything in his way, shouting "Ha!, Ha!, Ha!," as if that were the only word the horses could understand. Then right on the heels of the "Ha!, Ha!, Ha!" came "Whoa!, Whoa!, Whoa!." The "Whoa-Ha" term could in a second describe the need to cancel a time together on a weekend. In government work, the term often describes the stop and go that goes along a single direction, whereas in God's economy, the different elements of hurry up and stop now are usually associated with different directions, as with Jonah and the charge to go to Nineveh.

Shorty cared less but could understand Emily's frustrations at work.

"I sometimes have to pray." She paused to turn her palms up although she did not raise hands, but rather kept them to her side. "I sometimes have to pray against consternation. I say, Father, consternation is a form of hopelessness, and I recognize that it has no place in your kingdom, and I ask You to take it from me. One of my greatest struggles is the struggle with discouragement. I get impatient, and I get discouraged. Discouragement tends to go but impatience, well, seems to stay." She continued. "I once heard a testimony of a young person who'd been using her gifts of music in beer halls, gifts that had begun in church. The Lord dealt with her, told her, 'Come out with your hands up.' Do you suppose the Lord goes to Western movies?"

For a time, topics turned to stories Western and distant, yet most stories Eastern or Western are not that distant. The first

recorded "Hole in the Wall Gang" is the gang found in Ezekiel 8:7: "And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall." And inside were, what else, bad guys hanging out together. Plots with characters, but do the characters have character? The story is the work of the Lord in lives, or the tragedy of life outside the blessing and protection of God, and hammer as they will at making lives worth living, the playwright cannot breathe life into the characters, whether or not they have character.

On the elevator ride down, Shorty and Emily rode with the Judge and his frail, much-decorated wife (decorated in the sense of beautifying efforts, not in the battle ribbon sense although one could make a case for commemorative military ribbons for the long hard years of living with the Judge). They were on their way to the same theater, she much be-jeweled and well robed for the occasion. It was early December, windy. The temperature had perhaps burst through the upper echelons of cool, and into the upper middle quartile of almost cold. The Judge was in as fine a cashmere overcoat as you'd find in Beverly Hills, but he was unhatted, as compared to Shorty who donned his red beret for the short walk over to the theater. The ride down was with nods only, seemingly disapproving nods at that, and the foursome became two twosomes immediately upon departing the elevator.

On the Sunday of following week, Shorty had an experience similar to the musical hands-up lady, at a huge church, called Church on the Way, near Los Angeles. He'd gone with Emily to hear what he thought might be the Christmas program, but which turned out to be the last in a series of messages about angels. It was a rare topic and Emily wanted to hear what the noted Pastor Ambleard had to say. It was at the end of such a session that Shorty got thrown out of the seat to go to the altar (in the rear in this case) and say "I want to be like Emily," which is not the classic phrase but the altar worker understood, the point came across.

On the drive back that Sunday morning, Emily asked what the pastor had asked in the back room, to which Shorty replied, "I don't remember. I don't even know why I went up. I told him I wanted to be more like...Emily."

She smiled. "Just remember, God's kingdom is a kingdom of blessing. You bless in all directions, like the sun, blessing even your enemies. God's blessings are not so much allocated as broken and multiplied. It is true that there may be one job to be allocated and other limitations in the natural, and we do work in the natural, yet 'allocate' is basically a stingy concept, not an appropriate concept in understanding God's blessings. God is all sufficient, and if we don't understand the nature of His kingdom, we can get stingy and selfish in our prayers. Don't ask God to 'allocate' His blessing but rather to multiply His blessing. God did not create a brother or sister to create a

shortage for you but a blessing, when the brother or sister is working right, not out of kilter, not tilted this way or that. "

"Even if you'd rather hit 'em up side the head with a shovel just so they stand up straight and not tilt this way or that."

"Yes. It was an expression of my father to `make knots on your head,' and he would sometimes threaten it, but always with a smile. He never raised a lump that I know of. He used his words to water a weary soul, and never hit anyone with a shovel."

"I read in the Bible something about `turning swords into plowshares.'"

"But it also says, you can find another Scripture, talking about it being time to `turn your plowshares into swords.' But we root for everybody, swords are just to get the situation under control, kind of administrative stuff. If you have to hit 'em upside the head with a shovel, once the situation is under control, then get 'em an ice pack...until the police come and throw 'em in jail until such time as they don't need to be hit up side the head with shovel. That's my job, tell 'em about the Lord, so when they die they go to heaven, and when they're on earth, you don't have to make knots on their head."

"I still don't understand it all."

"Your heart leads you to the One who does understand. It is a family kind of thing more than a philosophy."

"I was reading something about the law is a schoolmaster leading us to..."

"Leading us to the Lord. We still want to do the right thing, but the law was revelatory of the Lord and his holiness, and revelatory of our shortcomings and need for redemption."

"The law is like a shovel, kind of hits you up side the head," said Shorty.

"You deal with God by the law, you end up in jail. The Lord comes along and asks you if you want out of jail? That's what happened to you today."

"I do feel better."

It was shortly thereafter that his temper took a marked turn for the better (in the sense of less), although the frozen up refrigerator would still pull a string of complaints and kicks when time was short and the refrigerator particularly uncooperative. The night Emily came, of course, Shorty had himself taken the time to defrost, which usually was Angel's job.

Some things changed slowly. If obedience is a downhill racer with slippery slopes and gravity doing most of the work, Shorty was for some time still astraddle the ski lift pole that takes others up the mountain. He wasn't even going up for fear someone would push him off the slope and his life would change too fast. There is a Scripture from the Song of Solomon which beckons the believer: `Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.'" Shorty wasn't the first one up the slopes. Eagles fly, badgers bore; Short just wanted to walk around for a while. But his progress was steady; and he did not go back. Gradually, things began to change; one by one, issue by issue, what needed to drop away did so and some things that needed to be added got added. With Shorty, the first to fall away was the anger.

And his work got better. "I don't require outstanding work but I know it when I see it. This isn't that but it is better. Shorty, you are getting better," his boss would comment some several weeks later.

It was a little over two weeks later that there came a rare knock on Shorty's door. There were 200 and plenty more pounds of his Judgeship, even without robes. This night, he came sans judicial robes or concert-going finery. He looked older here than his sixty plus years. He came crouched over ever so slightly with both hands in the pockets of his bathrobe.

"What can I do for you, Judge?," asked Shorty, who wore suit slacks and white t-shirt.

"I know who you are."

"I know who you are too, you're the Judge, so what?"

"I know you by reputation, and you are reputed to be a man of your word, a man who does what he says he will do, a man who can be trusted."

"I don't want to run sports bets to the casino for you, if that's what you want."

"I want to come in. This won't do in the hall."

"Ok."

Their conversation resumed just inside Shorty's chambers. "I am also a gambling man, but I do not want you to place a sports bet for me. I want you to hold some lottery money. An office pool if you will, but it is private, and rather good sums involved, \$4,500 to be exact. It is in this wrapper."

Shorty puzzled over the aluminum foil wrapped package. "Why bring it to me?"

"I have reason to believe that...there are rumors that some people are snooping about, it is a good sized pool, and I can no longer keep it in my chambers. I want you to keep it in a safe place."

"Here, put it in the refrigerator. You've got it wrapped tight. I don't want to touch it, for all I know, they've found a way to get fingerprints off of an aluminum foil wrapper. I don't even want to touch it."

"There is money, and a paper trail inside. Just keep it for me till this blows over. It is not impossible that they could even serve me a search warrant. I think it is very unlikely but.."

"I won't touch it."

"If you mess this up, I could make your life miserable, you know that."

"Oh, I know that."

"If you were to go out and bet, hoping you could double it, and play me for a silent but dumb partner... Well, that is not a loan."

"I'm not gonna touch it."

Shorty squirmed visibly and invisibly, but the squirm did not relieve. He felt like a foot in a tight shoe if you will. There is a solution that takes tight shoes to a cobbler to be stretched. There is a solution that buys thin socks. There is a solution that invests in a new pair of shoes, or switches to sandals.

There are those who seem to resolve themselves to the problem, and in their resolution may even delight in the problem, anticipating the joy of taking off the tight shoes at the end of a long day. The latter is closer to the Stoic solution, although admittedly, a good Stoic philosopher may whisper "try some thin socks" and hit upon a solution to a minor problem sometimes. They are a group of philosophers who do not so much seek to aggravate the problem. They are not masochists. They would not recommend that one with tight shoes go out and buy heavier socks. But they anticipate a mediocre god who predetermines a problem and gives them an assignment of resolution, subject to some poking around on virtue and do your best type of advice. Doing the best one can within one's limits may be defined as virtue and the goal in itself. Wipe one's brow - the child died but I tried my best to help, and my best is virtue attained, so grieve not.

This is a circle, a box, or rectangle, but some enclosure that does not break out. Indifference is not freedom. Virtue is not just in the will; pull something out of the grabbag of man's will and it is still soiled.

The Stoics did not understand the Mighty God. They did not understand the God of blessing. While a Stoic philosopher, one of the better ones on a good day, might have come up with a "try thin socks" solution to a tight shoe problem, this can be admitted, but what Stoic ever did anything about death, or an unjust judge?

Shorty went to his recliner, and pondered, and he thumbed through Epictetus that even Corot had read and some of the other Stoics that Doc had recommended. But they were judged no help.

Short's pondering turned to an out-loud prayer. "Father God, the unjust judge has brought me his gambling cache, and I don't want it. He presumes a lot to get me maybe in trouble, all for nothing, nothing but threats of what if I mess up. But I do believe that I am not under the thumb of the unjust judge. I believe I will be Ok in so far as this little matter. There was a time when I'd have been tempted to run the money out and try to build up something, putting his money on the bottom and hoping it builds up to something on top for me. So, I guess that it is for now."

Shorty arose from his recliner, but then standing, added: "Emily said, 'Don't just take coals to Newcastle, a town that's already got coal. Don't stack in one place what is needed in two or three or more. Don't take forgiveness just to people we like.' That's what she said. 'Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but blessing, knowing that we're call to inherit a blessing,' she said from somewhere in your book. She said you promised Abraham to not only bless him, but make him a blessing, that's the whole idea. I suppose I am supposed to bless the unjust judge, root for him. 'By prayer, lay the ax to the root of foolishness,' she also says that. Boy, she says a lot of things. 'Don't ask who your neighbor is, just be neighborly,' she says that's in your book. She says you can't pick a person to pray for like you're buying a farm, 'when was the barn last painted' kind of thing. I'd just as soon hit him upside the head with a shovel, a shovel that's already been used around the barn yard, make knots on his head like Mike Hammer would if he was dealing with a little punk or anyone giving him trouble."

At that statement, Shorty even got demonstrative. It was the first time he got demonstrative in prayer, and as a beginner, he got demonstrative at the wrong time...when he quit praying and wished God would smack someone. And while it was much of an Emily prayer, the demonstrative part was more Mike Hammer. But unlike Jonah, he didn't run away. He just complained and so did

not end up in the belly of a fish. His prayer continued.

"But this guy is a pretty big guy in terms of wherewithal when it comes to the matter of really getting me in trouble. So, somewhat cornered here perhaps, and somewhat short on alternatives, seemingly, maybe, yes, I guess I am short of solutions myself. So I don't see what I have to lose if I ask that You bless even the unjust judge. How? I don't know. I think Emily would like me to pray that, and she is nothing if it is not tight with you, so I think it will be Ok with you."

"Guess that is the end. I read in your book where it said David's prayers are ended. Well, Shorty's prayers have come to an end. I've got to get out of here and get my packages wrapped."

It was Christmas and time for the annual drudge to the mall to make a donation to a charity that wrapped gifts for donations. In the past, he'd had only a handful of gifts to deal with. He still mailed a gift to his mother, one for Doc, and most of the rest were office ones. The gift wrapping problem had been so sore that one year, the gifts went with a note: "Do you have a really good imagination - then imagine the gift is wrapped in any color you like with any ribbon that suits you."

For two years now, he'd gone to the mall and had Hope for Homeless Youth wrap his gifts. He liked them and liked the idea of their work, and donated rather generously (generous then for Shorty) over and above the gift wrapping services. The problem was aggravated this year because there were more to deal with - Emily, the kids, even a small picture frame for the Mother of Many who had told the kids that he was so ugly that no woman would ever have him, not even Emily. With the small picture frame, he sent a picture of he and Emily in the park.

And it was unusually cold. The weather forecast even said "chance of snow," a weak threat or hope, as you prefer, that no one took seriously.

He'd bundled up for the mall across from the Beverly Center, and came hunched over with two plastic bags of gifts. The charity wrapping gifts this year was an animal shelter - "We spay cats and dogs, and more," their little sign read. They too did a nice job of the gifts, the one young and the one old who tag teamed wrapping Shorty's gifts between helping one-gift customers.

It was such a relief, Shorty left with: "If you'd ever seen me wrap a gift, oh, burrr, it was not a pretty sight. Your sign should say 'We spay cats and dogs, and we help bachelors wrap their Christmas packages.' Oh, God bless you, I really appreciate it."

On his drive home, Shorty muttered, "I wonder if it is too late to call Ox. I think I will, Ox is up late."

Chapter 17

The next night, Ox entered an old hospital that had been so sick itself that it was sold for not much to a church that took up the burden of renovation.

It was the annual Christmas party of Home for Hopeless Youth, an annual celebration for donors, with tours and videos of accomplishments and work in process. Lab followed lecture. The donors and friends of the ministry were invited to stay and work the round-up of homeless youth who were to be treated to food and drink and some fun in the form of games and presents. The young pastor encouraged the guests to help or "be angels that roll away the stone that the proof of the resurrection come forth."

The party was in the final phase where the guests of honor were arriving wearing (or worn by) tatoos, nose rings, and chains galore. The men were often in hairstyles termed mohawk or spike; the ladies wore hairstyles beyond categories or classification but tending toward an amount of hair that was so closely cropped that it mostly defied embellishment. One even came with a pet, a mouse that abode and rode upon the shoulders of the young lady in t-shirt and leather jacket. The names were, well, almost Runyonesque but more abbreviated - there was Alf, and Bugs, and other names expressive in a single syllable.

Ox asked, "Where is the main guy? I come with gifts."

The young pastor was summoned, and the donation business was quickly consummated, for Ox had in fact brought gifts.

"You need appliances, I brought one, and there's another gift inside. I don't know what it is inside but it is yours."

"Do they want receipts."

"Nobody said anything about receipts."

"Is it your gift?"

"No."

"Who is giving it?"

"No one is to know, but I'll ask about receipts."

"What is it?"

"A refrigerator, a half a refrigerator."

"Well, we can't deal with it now. The dorm rooms are on the

third floor, and everyone is mostly away, wrapping gifts, or busy with the party at hand. Just put it in the corner behind the refreshment table. Do you need any help?"

"No." With that, Ox went outside to retrieve Shorty's refrigerator which he lifted and placed in its allotted spot without strain.

"There is another gift?," asked the pastor.

"Inside, I was told to tell you to look inside and soon."

As the pastor bent to open the half refrigerator, he found the aluminum foil and soon found its contents, but by the time he did, Ox had left to rejoin Shorty waiting in a rented pick-up.

The young pastor's response was of a rejoicing nature, a rejoicing loud only for second but enjoyed for a good long while thereafter. He took the \$4,500 packet to his office, locked it in safe keeping, from which it was later retrieved, counted, reported and bookkept the next day, and well used in days after. The papers that came with the gift made no sense to the pastor but looked to be just wrapping, and so were thrown away.

The night of its receipt, two of the hundreds were broken into smaller bills with the help of a donor electrician and his librarian wife, and distributed as door prizes to each of the young, homeless guests, who could not be classified by occupation, many of whom would accept the invitation to stay or return.

Chapter 18

Came early January and the end of Christmas sermons, Chaplain Emily sat in her shared office around a round table with four who'd gotten permission to stay after chapel for group "counseling," as it had to be called to those who grant permission to stay after chapel. She preferred a round table as a reminder that all come by the same grace, allowing a later time for when the real Head of the table returns.

The watchers on Emily's side of the wall were portraits of patriots, a scroll of a favorite hymn and "The Karlsruhe Crucifixion" by Grunnewald, xeroxed from a book from the library and hung by pin, without frame, but with a note in pencil at the top which had the ring of an accounting: "This I have done for you, What have you done for me?"

And there was one little plaque;

"Repentance, or Grace is a Lady."

"Can I see Grace?," asked the prisoner.

"Grace is a lady," said the receptionist,

"Do you have an appointment?"

"How do you make an appointment with Grace?"

"All you have to do is cancel your other appointments," was the reply.

"I'm a prisoner. I have no other appointments," he said.

"I'll call Grace," said the receptionist.

"Buenos tardes," came from across the table. Emily replied, engrossed, not looking up from her papers, "It is good to be late." The Lord had dealt with Emily about tardiness as a discourtesy but this day she had been unavoidably detained.

The chaplain went on to speak of a perspective of the Scriptures as a whole, an edifice.

"A construction, a place put together with this and that to serve a purpose, principally a place of abiding, a home, a place of safety. Is not the history of the Lord's redemption a construction, a building, a place of refuge? Psalm 18:2. Is not the construction of man in Egypt under the taskmaster of sin a never-ending toil that gets harder and harder? Exodus 1:14, 5:6-19."

"The promise of the Savior, even in Genesis (Genesis 3:15), the hint of a Mediator between God and man in Job (Job 9:33), are they not bricks? `Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.' Genesis 6:8. This is a brick, and without it there would be no building, and none to occupy the place of refuge. The faith of

Abraham is a brick, as are the prayers of Daniel. But all their doings are to tell the story of the Son, who has all preeminence because the Father purposed that all the fullness should abide in Him."

Reading, she said: "`And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.'" Colossians 1:17-19"

"The Lord asks us to see the story of redemption as a careful construct, a refuge He has built with much time, with care to the scheduling, with meticulous measurement. He is the Architect. You could not build, or conceive of such a construction as the Lord has set forth in his Word."

"As in Amos, he lays the plumbline. As we read the Scriptures, think of them as a construction, a refuge, built with the meticulous care of the Master Builder, the Carpenter of humble (earthly) beginnings and glorious end."

It was a time of much political trouble in the country and discussion of "them and us" and different rules for us and them. "Why don't we have more politicians at chapel?, Chaplain Emily," was the question, which is to say, "Shouldn't there be more of the powerful ones in jail?"

The matter of "them and us," and "why us?" and "not them?" in a jail setting were recurring questions posed to a jail chaplain. Emily talked generally of the Scriptures on the topic.

"Men and women were both equally guilty if caught in adultery. The rendering of blind justice with balancing scales is mocked but it is not laughable at all. Whoever called for such a depiction had in mind, surely, not a laughable justice but one Scriptural, one based on the mandate, Testaments Old and New, that says in matters of justice, the judge is not to have respect of persons, not weigh the weighty person more favorably but weigh the deeds. But we are to bless even those in authority over us."

Chaplain Emily took out a 1942 Government Printing Office, Song and Service Book for Ship and Field, Army and Navy, that was her father's. She read Washington's prayer written at Newburg, June 8, 1783, and sent to the Governors of all the States.

"Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in thy holy protection, that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government, and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large.

And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.

Grant us our supplications, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

And so agreed those of this round table.

"We are responsible, make no doubt. 'The devil made me do it,' doesn't get you off. And 'I am the captain of my ship,' is just bunk philosophy floating on high expectations till the ship sinks."

"Needs. Man's fundamental condition is one of need. He needs breath, food, drink, fellowship, time. It is laughable that man seeing some talent in residence, rise up, peek over his needs and proclaim that he can rule the world."

"Your life is like a book. Maybe you didn't choose to have such a book. But if God is the author and librarian, your book is checked out to you. Your book is not just a blank page, but it is not true what the existentialists would have you believe, that there is nothing on a page that you can't write yourself. You can't grab ahold of your will like a pen and write on the page any story you like. If you will let Him, the Lord will write your story with a good ending."

"It is your job to recognize that the story is not turning out right, or as Paul said, the law is a schoolmaster to lead us to the Lord. There is sin in residence, the fallen nature of man, and sin come visiting, yet it is also true that the Scripture says the Lord lights every man that comes into the world, so the story can get like a mystery that is difficult to unravel. The Lord is the author and finisher of our faith. Let Him erase, blot out, start the story over. It is your responsibility to know that the story of your life needs to start over."

"It is your responsibility to know the last chapter is death without God. Like a child toddles away from something frightening, you're to turn in childlike faith from that last chapter. What are you going to do when the floods of judgment come?; get on the ark. What are you going to do when the floods of judgment come?; get on the ark."

"Like Bogie in the African Queen, stuck in a marsh, fell into the boat," said a prisoner.

"At the end of human strength, after Bogie got on the boat

...with Katherine of course, then the rains came and floated the boat to safety," said Emily. "Even Bogie, at the end of his strength, couldn't get himself and Katherine Hepburn out of the reeds. It took the rain."

The talk turned to some topics perhaps less lofty but nevertheless important. Sister Emily taught from rules of etiquette that Washington had learned as a young man - don't hum so as to vex others, don't stand if others in the room are sitting, etc. There was talk of clothes, hat buying lessons, job interviews, render to others courteously and see if it doesn't return, and on and on.

When with women's groups, she warned against shopping at the "belly-button boutique," the bare midriff female style of design on men. "Rust, fear rust from exposure, young ones," she warned. But Emily didn't so much get invited back to women's groups. Despite her lack of knowledge of the male specialty, it was her gifting to teach them.

The Sunday afternoon session of this round table disbanded after a brief reminder, a perspective on how to serve. She read from a devotional.

"Kings and paupers. Who is on top, and who is on the bottom? Who serves, and who gets served? Did not the Son leave kingship to become a pauper, to return to kingship with us. He served for a bride, as Jacob, for love. And doesn't the Son as king still serve us with needful provision? He is the lamb, the redeemer, and the lion who clears the way to the fullness of the acknowledging of His authority. Does He not still mediate between us and the Father? Concern yourselves less about rank and more about the work. Serve as servant, serve as leader, all the while exalting the kingship of the Son."

She closed with a Scripture: "`And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.'"

"But we're still in jail?," one asked, as he left.

"Serve in prayer, serve in the cell. You have a captive audience. Paul and Silas preached to the jailer. Preach the evangelism of character, the evangelism of a changed life, a life worth having, wherever you are. Don't define your place by a place. Seek your place by the Lord's side. The Lord has a place for you in His kingdom, and work to do in this life. But set your sights on things above. The excitement is in the Spirit anyway. It's not by rank or might but by the Lord's Spirit. Seek to become less that the Lord become more in you."

"But it is better to be outside."

"No doubt, it is better to be out. But when you're out, remember that liberty is an insufficient concept in man's hands because it lacks the presence of Almighty God working in one's life. Liberty alone, walking the tightrope of performance, only leaves one falling in the dust, into the grave, broken. Best to be a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, one with the Spirit of liberty, walking in an obedience that frees you to a life of fulfillment and achievement, a life of right-doing, a life of fellowship with your God. To be free from righteousness is a horrible state, even if called freedom. Better to be free from sin and a servant of righteousness."

She gave this special prisoner a sheet with an abridged sermon she gave once on heavenly Jerusalem, a sermon she called her "knees sermon."

"Knees. A very vulnerable point, the knees. Smiting in the knees is a horrible judgment. Deut. 28:35 Knee space, crawl space. How useful are the knees."

"A place for embracing children. Gen. 50:23. To the redeemed who love Jerusalem, the Lord promises that we will share her joy: 'That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees.' Isa. 66:11, 12."

"But to the rebellious, their knees shall be as weak as water. Ez. 7:17. 21:7."

"The humbled knee is useful in prayer. 1 Kings 8:54, 2 Chr. 6:13, Ezr. 9:5, Dan. 6:10. Paul said, 'I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...' that the fullness of the blessing might fall. Eph. 3:14

"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love. May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Eph. 3:16-19.

"The Lord has strengthened us, even in the knees, that we may do my work, but is not the Lord's work that you may believe in the anointed one, the Son. John 6:29. Bow the

knee, pray, that He may cause you to know the love of Christ, and to be filled with my fullness. And you shall be `dandled' upon the knees of the heavenly Jerusalem, and rejoice in all that the Lord has for her."

"What is `dandled' the prisoner would ask next week?"

"Bounced," Emily would reply, "Bounced, if I remember. It must be in the constitution of citizenry in the heavenly Jerusalem that citizens are entitled to be...well, bounced upon the King's knees. Only the Lord would write such a book. Only the Lord could write such a story."

Chapter 19

Emily joined Shorty at a gathering, also in a circle, downstairs just outside the entrance to the Los Angeles Central Jail. Shorty gathered with a group of volunteers who distribute New Testaments with Psalms and Proverbs to the jails and other places. The prayer began to the left of the one in charge of the logistics and closing prayer, and having begun, quickly spread clockwise back to the leader, having encompassed the twelve volunteers and six chaplains who would accompany them to the cell rows. As one approaches the entrance of LA Central jail, the sidewalk curves right a bit before one is upon what seems like all concrete. Above the area of prayer, even that was all concrete, pillars propping up an expanse of concrete.

It was not actually Shorty's first visit but it would be the first time he'd ever covered more than a single assigned area. "I don't want to go into jail on my day off," shrugged Shorty when Emily suggested he join the group. But he relented when he understood that it was somehow important to her.

Shorty had very little conception of how God might work together among the many, even hide the imperfections of a helpful one among the many, creating kinships so complex yet purposeful that they might be likened to a panel of flashing lights, a panel that did not so much explain the complexity of the matrix as indicate that work was going on toward a purpose. And with the work, there is a knitting together of the body with an increase that only comes from God.

Emily was one of fifteen chaplains serving the 7,000 or so prisoners in the men's facility for LA County, which doesn't count those housed in the newer Twin Towers. This was old school, nothing fancy, just an old jail building, but it did have its artistic touches.

As one enters the lower, less occupied floors, there is a surprising amount of muraled walls, mostly athletic themes and the like. One would naturally choose kick ball trophies over jail, but what if one gets out of jail and wins all the kick ball trophies in the world? "All the kick ball trophies in the world won't save the soul," Emily had said in one of her Bible classes.

Shorty took a dolly, three boxes of Bibles, 100 each, and proceeded with the group into the check-in, check-out area with bars before and after the worker who monitors access. There are lists to be compared to driver's licenses, questions to be asked. There are always some questions that come up when Bibles are distributed in jails.

The monitors of access are pretty much invisible, behind shielded

areas of glass or more, but their voices are easily heard. The man asks for driver's licenses to be put into the little chute area, not unlike a bank teller would ask for the components of a banking transaction. And as with a teller window, the same monitor figures pluses or minuses, deposits and withdrawals, although counting people rather than dollars.

Past the barred-in entry monitor's area, the central entryway and exitway had its own little personality quite distinct from other such areas in the guts of the jail. Walls and doors and windows may look much alike, but there is an observable decline in frills as one progresses into more of the jail. Art declines, murals are few, and how-to-do-it notices increase the more one gets into the guts of the system. "Hands in pockets, Shoulder to the wall," type of notices. But the goal of this hallway, like many others, was just to get the person from one monitoring area to another.

One such area that Shorty would see later that day had a door with instructions, indicating merely "Do not knock on the window," and "Do not stand in the red box," the area marked in red paint right outside the door. The idea was to jut up quickly to the area to the right of the door where one would expect a door knob but instead there was an area which took voice messages, with or without amplification wasn't clear from the outside. From there access to two rows of prisoners on the left, and two rows of prisoners on the right, could be gained. You could go up some stairs to one row but down other stairs to the row monitored by the same station, the same up and down arrangement right and left.

Unlike old prison movies, the walk areas just outside the cells do not permit the possibility of anything throwing himself down to the cell row below - it cannot be done. Suicide is not permitted. But what was visible to the side of the red box, through the darkened windows, were lights with colors flashing as electrical controls opened and closed the whatever it was that allowed the people to come and go.

As one enters from the street, there is an obvious uniformity in the uniforms because you mostly see cops. There were mostly dark green slacks and light green shirts, talkies and cuffs to the side. And initially, as one enters, there seemed to be uniformity in the uniforms of the prisoners. But as the visit progresses, it becomes apparent that there are pockets of uniformity admixed with such diversity that it would seem to indicate a code. That day, the prisoners that Shorty saw were initially all in blue garments, top and bottom, then he saw some in light blue trousers and white tops. Then some blue slacks and orange tops. Then some green tops and light blue pants. But in groups.

In their cells, the prisoners wore not their own shoes, certainly no boots, but tong-type devices or hospital-slipper looking things, very light. It was as if they were so bad they couldn't even be trusted with shoes, like Toots when she didn't get her plastic toy or Moses at the burning bush.

A tough guy might take some false pride at being in jail, but when it gets right down to it, it surely ought to be embarrassing, humbling, to know that you can't even be trusted with shoes.

As they passed the initial access monitoring area, each getting a temporary badge except for the chaplains, each getting to keep their shoes, there was an initial re-grouping in the floor with the mess hall. The mess hall was an area of much Bible distribution because it was quick and efficient to hand out Bibles on the men's exit or entry from mess. At mess, there is an accumulation of prisoners in one spot that is heavily controlled.

Volunteer Bible passers are told not to start up a conversation in the hallway with one prisoner, which tends to bring another, and another. There are ways and rules, and points discussed but never resolved, such as whether to leave the Testament at rest, which is to say, whether to leave it at rest on a cross bar or whether to put one's hand through the bars, or whether to shake a prisoner's hand for that matter. (As we indicated, the New Testament is with Psalms and Proverbs, which are hardly parenthetical in nature.)

One thing that might be surprising is that there is very little open scoffing by prisoners, and the turn-down rate is quite low. An aside to tell a story that I once heard at a convention. A group of cell mates take Testaments, but they don't take them to read but to play cards with. And they're betting Philippians by chapter, and calling John's gospel by chapter, and so on, and eventually get to reading what they're betting, and, well, that's how some prisoners get to be chaplains.

The trip up to the mess hall at the LA County jail is by way of the freight elevator with a huge dumpster of food remnants. The smells of the elevator mix with the food-of-ill-repute smells of the dumpster, which combine in a way to make one lose appetite. The food wasn't that bad, but one couldn't tell it from the smells on the freight elevator.

There were workers of all classes in abundance. Nurses delivering pills. Although there are separate medical wings in the jail proper, there is a pill-to-prisoner delivery system in operation, along with food servers, male and female, of every nationality imaginable. That man is ever needy is no more evident than in a jail where the basic goal is to keep people

still and away from their shoes, yet there is a massive work effort that goes into such bare, minimum sustenance of the human condition.

As Shorty got off the mess floor, he remarked about the obvious decline in the number of murals on the walls. Walls became mostly walls. But there were two exceptions, one a mural of John Wayne in Western sheriff mode. The brush strokes pertaining to the nose were so excessive, the nose so large and unlike him as to almost lose his likeness. There was only one other mural of a swat team, farther down the hall, right at the exit of the mess hall. John the Cook would have approved. He did not like complaints either.

Assignments were made, rules rehearsed (don't dawdle, don't get chatty and become a prisoner-gathering-place in the middle of the walkways) and Shorty went with two men and Chaplain Emily to a lower floor to begin distribution.

The men and needs were varied, but the variables to the task at hand were relatively few. There are Testaments (with Psalms and Proverbs) in brown and blue, colors distinguishing English and Spanish. One can start at the first row and work down, or go down and work back up, or keep your own Bible box and work alone or team up, one holding and the other or others distributing. Different combinations were tried in different rows of cells, but it didn't seem to matter much. Shorty and his team fell into the go-down, work-back-up, one-holds-the-box-but distributes-too, but-generally-stay-together approach. This approach only works if you mix the brown and blue in one box, leaving the partial boxes at the entry to the cell row.

The cells are many but not endless, and their principal trait seems the characteristic of smallness. There is a Scripture of blessing, a get-ready-for-more type theme, which basically told Old Testament believers that God would expand the pegs of their tents. This was in sharp contrast. There were no tents, no pegs, just bars that were not moving.

In a cell, there are typically six bunks and six men. Facing the cell, there are four bunks on one side, a bunk and a bunk each with a bunk above, but only a single top and bottom bunk on the other side. The gap in the latter is sufficient for facilities and (sometimes) phone. There are often shower areas in the entry section of the cell row, and sometimes a small tv area, even in the depths of the jail.

Exercise is roof top. Walk space within the typical cell for the typical man would not make more than three or four full steps even if he were the only one in the cell. The jail business is booming. On the day Shorty distributed Bibles, rarely was there less than a full cell.

Colors were many but more dull than bleak. An odd consistency seemed the gray bars. There was much gray everywhere, but not the kind of light, beautiful gray for which Corot was famous. There was much dark green. Some cells had dark green walls. I am told restaurants practice color codes that are supposed to get people to eat up fast and go. Whether it was strategy or accident, these were not those colors.

Instructions were plentiful outside the cells. Shoulders-to-the-wall, hands-in-pockets, no-talking, etc. Inside the cells, there was little to be done but sit or stoop or stand, maybe pace, and written instructions were rare.

This was Shorty's first visit as a volunteer, and he made some mistakes, one of which was to forget his belt. Shorty started out with a box of Spanish Bibles but ended up as the designated Bible-box holder, the box mixed with Spanish and English. The box was not heavy, and he was expected to distribute with the free hand. Shorty had the Bible box in his left arm, crooked, while with the other he'd place the Bibles as fast as he could walk. But he struggled for lack of another hand to hold up his pants, suit pants, the volunteers adhered to a business suit code when about official business. The situation was not critical, and the work got done. With Shorty, the problem went mostly unnoticed, as one goes about routinely doing bothersome things that become habitual, while the more variable things get attended to. But one prisoner tried to help, offering Shorty a foot of rope as he returned from the back of the cell row. The offer was simply, "Here, you need this worse than I do."

Shorty declined the man's rope, but stopped to smile at him. While other volunteers talked plentifully, Shorty'd just been about the manual work at hand. He was used to talking to former prisoners and the difference in former and current is not that great, but with the parolees he met in his work, he had the edge. He was outside looking in and they looking out, but it wasn't the same. It was a new relationship and one he wasn't too easy with, this business of asking hard cases if they'd like a Bible, plus Shorty was not one to talk much ever. It took a little nudge, or comfort zone, or something to do with golf, something special to get him started.

In this case, it was as if the prisoner had poked a hole in the silence. The rope offer went unnoticed by the other volunteers and didn't seem to mean much to the other prisoners. It may have been a spoof, but again, it might have been more. When talking with Emily about it later, he compared it to the street person who asked for a quarter, got a dollar, and when Shorty turned to leave, the man called him back to make change. It may have meant many things, but to Shorty, he explained to Emily, it seemed as if he were saying, "I mean what I say. My words mean something when I say them, just like other people."

"For a prisoner, a man who can't be trusted with shoes, to give up his rope, I took it to mean something." Emily thought that it could perhaps be compared to the widow's mite. All she had, even her living, had been entrusted to the temple treasury. It was seen by the Lord and commented on as meaningful in His sight. "I wonder if a prisoner giving up his rope to help a man distribute Bibles would be viewed as the widow giving up her all, interesting thought," Emily would later say.

The effect of the rope wasn't to make Shorty talky as those things go, but it did get him to talking to the prisoners beyond "Free Bibles, English, Spanish." "God bless you," began to come out once in a while.

Questions began to come his way more often. They were mostly the usual requests for writing paper, pencils, stamps, or reading glasses, anything to do with the senses and communication, but one twenty-year old with a burr haircut beckoned him to the bars on a different matter. He held an open, softcover, full Bible in a modern translation. It was well worn, but obviously not by the current user.

"I was told that it is an occult thing. You ever hear of this translation?," asked the prisoner.

"No," admitted Shorty, "I'm not an expert, but it looks like a regular Bible to me."

"Look, is this in the Bible?"

The prisoner pointed as he held the Bible through the bars. He pointed to the book of "Lamentations," tried to pronounce it but could not.

"That's in there," said another volunteer, a large, suspended, black man named Carl.

"And this, "Joel," is that in there?"

"The book of "Joel" is in there," Shorty told him. "There shouldn't be anything wrong with that Bible, do you think?"

"Should be all right," said Carl.

"I knew a guy once named Joel," said the young prisoner.

"Different guy," Shorty assured him. It was a bit of an experience being asked a question like he was to know one Bible from another. It was a new experience within a bigger new experience which was the whole afternoon. It pleased him to be asked a question he was sure of.

The work got done, and more comfortably as the experience progressed. The pants stayed up without a rope for a belt.

The more severe problem was strength. The two and half hour trek was admixed with much start and stop, so that the actual work time was less than two hours. But after an hour, Shorty had to stop and sit, holding up the group for the few minutes it took to get his breath.

Toward the end of the Bible distribution, Emily told Shorty, "You're going to see Alexandra's and Aaron's father. The dad's in the next bunch of cells. I'll go down that row with you and point him out."

He was a man of ear rings and needs. He needed reading glasses, and writing paper, and a phone book - communication goals aimed at communication with other than his cell mates. He was a pleasant, milktoasty, sad enough fellow, Shorty would remark to Emily later. "He seemed to have no strength. I was surprised to see him even get off the bunk. Yet he didn't seem sick. I could not somehow feel sorry for him. And I'll not tell his children I saw their father."

Emily said, "He never asks about the children, just about other matters. The Scriptures say the Lord will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. But the time is not full yet, it seems. The sons of the first Adam, the sons of a fallen father, it is a sad sight."

Shorty saw several familiar faces, and remembered a handful by case name, last name. But he had never seen the men all admixed together, so packed in together in one place. The problems seemed even heightened by the perspective that arises from a fast-paced scurry to distribute Bibles down the rows, a perspective of an accumulation of helplessness - people helpless yet harmful, all in rows like little dots, a multicolored landscape in pointillism style of the human condition, man as sand or dust, cursed dust at that.

Chapter 20

There is a Scripture that promises the redeemed: "But we all, with open face beholding, as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." That Sunday evening, Shorty had been on his stool at mid-mirror, thinking about that Scripture, mostly shaking his head in puzzlement.

Shorty came to the door in response to a quiet knock. His expression showed that he expected the worst. He was in a faded blue bathrobe. He found the Judge in suit.

"I want to see it."

"It isn't here."

"Where is it?"

"It's not here."

"If you've spent it or lost it, you'll be sorry."

"Tomorrow, six o'clock tomorrow, at your place."

"My wife will be out, Ok. You better..."

"I don't work for you," said Shorty.

Came the appointed time the next day, and there knocked at the Judge's door the pastor of Hope for Homeless Youth. The young pastor rarely wore a suit but he did that night. He came with Ox in denims and a sweater about to burst, and a staffer-trainee in mid "program." The trainee wore badly faded jeans. Out of the chain about the neck arose a twirly, complicated, ominous tatoo that led up to a Mohawk-style cut of hair as high as wheat in a tall row. He had a camera, not the disposable kind, but a camera that had at one time been quite expensive.

"I'm Pastor Clayton from Hope for Homeless Youth. We are told you changed your mind, and decided you wanted a tax receipt. We sure wanted to thank you, and we'd actually like to take your picture for our newsletter, if you'd agree."

"No, no," said the Judge, assessing the situation. "I can't ask you in." He pondered the tax-deductible receipt for \$4,500. "I don't know what to say."

"Well, Judge," said Pastor Clayton.

"Who told you I was a judge?"

"Well,..."

"Never mind. I can't ask you in, you've come at a most inopportune time." The Judge's condominium was quite large and well decorated, with portions dedicated as "Museums of My Accomplishments," idols which he proudly displayed. But they were not displayed this night.

"Thanks again. There is a fatherlessness in the land, abandoned children, children who have no hope in their spirit or soul, and trust that we'll make good use of your generosity. God bless you. I trust that those whom you bless with your generosity will greet you when you get to heaven."

The Judge watched Pastor Clayton and his trainee depart to the elevator. Ox gave a look and a squint toward the Judge, as a look of protection toward a friend. He knocked, the door opened, and he entered without a word into Shorty's condo where the two had a brief prayer for the situation...and the Judge.

Then they went to an indoor driving range with nets where Shorty introduced Ox to golf.

That was the end of the matter for some time.

Chapter 21

Shorty and Emily thought it time to bring Ox to the museum.

They stood before a picture of a perfectly nice, non-stylized, brown cow enjoying a stroll in a field. The brown cow had not just landed. It was a non-flying cow. The field was not an air strip. It was not Norman Rockwell portraiture with a story but going a little bit in that direction of Americana at its most innocent, Americana with a sense of purpose and prosperity achieved. Into this atmosphere came a topic Russian, turbulent, Jewish, and beautiful.

Emily recalled, "Chagall complained that the Russian bureaucrats would ask him, 'Why is the cow blue?' Now, the question is, 'Why is the cow brown?'"

"Can you imagine a guy bringing this painting up to the museum committee, said Shorty.

"`The Los Angeles County Museum of Art needs to buy this painting of a cow,'" said Emily as the artist's agent.

"`Is the cow blue?,'" asked Shorty, mimicking the museum committee.

"`No. Nor does the cow fly, like in a Chagall.'"

"`You don't mean... the cow is on the ground, eating grass. Oh, my, that will never do. On the other hand, it would be new," said Shorty.

Emily, as animal activist turned art lover, "A flying cow depicts the animal's desire to escape, a steak on the lamb if you will, and man's inhumanity to cow. Now if the picture of the brown cow also depicts a farmer, drooling, overweight, ravenous, sneaking up on the cow with a fork in hand, now that would be a small essay in the form of a painting, and that would be worth considering."

"Pitch fork?," asked Shorty.

"No, fork fork."

"The farmer in the background has only a pitch fork for hay, sorry," said Shorty, acting as the soon to be out of work artist's agent.

Emily pulled from her purse her Bed and Breakfast Bible which contained Isaiah, from which she read.

"And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' or serpent's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

She added, "There is endless variety in God's creation, in the specifics of his blessedness and holiness and wisdom. Yet many have lost their eye, persevering after anything that is different."

As they came to the hall where they had first met, Ox approached the German Expressionist painting, which was still bleak and black and purple. Ox was not spontaneous in his normal conversation, but rather slow and methodical and tending toward few and short when it came to the matter of words. But here, out came, quickly, not quietly, "Booh, booh!" This was pronounced not as "boo" as to scare, but as a scare received, a "booh" that goes with a shiver. Ox quick stepped away without other comment, shaking his shoulders as if that would shake off the thought.

A Scripture, Proverbs, depicts wisdom as saying, "But he that sins against me wrongs his own soul: all they that hate me love death." Ox may have been rather simple but he was no fool. Ox had suffered much neglect as a child, much street violence as a young man, prison, marriage to an unfaithful woman with voices in her head, and the pressure of a family and no means to support them. But I am told that he'd not been known to shiver in fear till he strolled the halls of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art that December day with Sister Emily and Shorty.

Emily was translating a Picasso exhibit and a lady docent's lecture. "`Analytic cubism,' things hanging on an invisible grid, like lost souls hanging on an invisible grid, as if held up by an illusory grid, like shattered glass glued together by false gods and hung up in a museum for all to see and scoff and wonder at, held to the wall by tender-hooks." She added, "The docent said, 'In cubism, the object is no longer the point.' But what if the object is people?" She smiled at Shorty and shrugged, then gave him a nudge.

Someone sneezed, and the docent and others said, "Bless you." "A blessing is nothing to sneeze out," said Emily, "Isn't it a shame in most cases you have to sneeze to be blessed. Oh, if they only knew." They did not finish the lecture but walked out quietly, shortly after the sneeze that brought on the blessing.

They rode alone up the huge, slow LACMA elevator that goes from the lecture hall up to the street level, an elevator so terribly slow that "It must be to protect the paintings from being

jarred," said Shorty. "The Lord's art work is so precious, it is true that sometimes it is necessary to go ever so slow less the person shatter."

They talked of Ox's wife and how the Lord had restored her. "Put her on your slow elevator if need be, Lord, she is still so fragile, but when you're done, we know she'll be unique, quite unique as you bring forth something new each time."

"But, we trust, she'll look more like a Corot than a Picasso," said Shorty.

"Definitely," said Emily, "we know that much. We are all the Lord's paintings in progress but we are to know and tell the Lord's touches, His brush strokes."

"Helping people is so delicate, it take's the Lord's hand, the Lord's touch. There's the burr principle, I call it."

"The burr principle?"

"Burrs, little stickers that catch upon your shoes and pant legs as you go. Try to shake them off and they just want to stay. Only a bit of the hand's pull will do the job, but then too much pressure and the other hand has to extricate the other hand. Just so much and no more. There is a just so much and no more as the Lord leads us in helping others and going about His affairs."

She continued, "There is a touch that requires the Lord's hand. One can apply a right principle to a wrong wound and leave the patient worse off. We need the learn the tugging of the Lord's Spirit, and learn to trust in His firmness or gentleness for task at hand."

The night of the Picasso lecture, Emily and Shorty snickered at the idea that the overweight, short, boxy young woman dressed so as to try to be alluring was an example of "curvilinear cubism." But this didn't take. They rarely laughed at people's expense. "Help her Lord," was Emily's simple prayer for the woman.

This night, more so than the night some weeks before when they'd attended the Picasso lecture, Shorty was visibly in poor health. He was mostly quiet, frail, visibly uncomfortable. Suspenders replaced the belt that seemed to never quite do.

Shorty had taken to growing a beard, which was at the itchy stage. He'd scratch his beard with one hand, take Emily's hand with the other, now that he had both hands free. The beard was an experiment that did not last.

He and Emily held hands much of the afternoon. They mostly talked and let Ox wander the galleries of the museum with which

they were so familiar, always keeping him in sight.

"Did you hear about a lottery going on in the court house?"

"No, what?"

"The talk is some judges and others had a lottery betting on when parolees go back to jail. It was a pyramid scheme, and it built up. But they'd basically bet that `so and so' violated parole and went back to jail within a certain time."

Naw, you don't say," said Shorty.

"Like in the stock market, you short stocks, selling them before you buy them, hoping the price goes down. They were shorting people. Gambling on people's lives, like Greek gods."

"Naw, you don't say," said Shorty.

"The Lord's way is to take the most downtrodden and beat up and pick 'em and change 'em. The Lord's way is to bless people."

"Yea."

Ox mostly liked the American realism section, and the picture of the blue collar workers and ladies with bundles riding the public transport. And he liked the picture of the young girl in the pretty pink blouse reading as she tended the two cows. And Ox was briefly introduced to Corot that day.

Ox walked ahead of them, and Shorty and Emily were left in front of a wedding picture, and there Shorty did something he had not planned on. He began his marriage proposal with a nod of his head to the painting, "You me too?," he asked.

She was taken aback, very much surprised, but then she said, "Ditto, kiddo." "You me too, ditto kiddo" was a phrase Emily used between them for complete agreement. "But ..," she said.

"Well, you just go climb a tree," he said.

"Well, you just go climb a tree," she said, then smiled and held his hand tighter. Then she kissed him on his scratchy cheek.

That evening, Shorty and Emily were dressed up for another, albeit rare, evening at the Music Center. On the elevator, they encountered the Judge and his wife on their way down to the market located on the ground floor. The Judge had a paper under his arm, and cigars in his pocket. Mrs. Judge explained, "It is so hard to cook for two sometimes. I'm going to treat the Judge to his favorite, liverwurst with lots of mayo."

"Oh, you must be Judge Brand, Oh, I want to congratulate you on your anonymous gift to that ministry for homeless youth! That was such a wonderful gesture. And you wouldn't let them put your picture up. How rare, how nice. God bless you."

"Oh," said Mrs. Judge. The Judge grimaced, but went immediately into silent preparation for the work to be done at the bar of explanations. Every home, wherever, has a place where members are called to the bar of explanations, usually at night if one is an adult, even if one is a judge during the day. Often times, the bar of explanation is the kitchen table when it is bare, as if one hopes the explanations will bring a shared meal that speaks of peace and resolution.

That night, Shorty would return to the parking lot to kiss Emily good night.

"You go climb a tree," he assured her.

"Well, you go climb a tree, too," she assured him.

He rode up the elevator alone. He tried to do his back-to-the-door, knuckle-to-the-elevator-floor trick but he missed, and cut a small place on his finger that took a band-aid. But he was quite happy.

Chapter 22

Shorty stood at the brightly lit window in his faded blue robe, playing with the blinds such that his shadow cast long but in and out across the floor. He'd envisioned the perfect body experts on tv selling their programs with him as a "before" story. He lifted the cords of the blinds to the belated Christmas music on the radio and gave one small kick that didn't get much past the ankle. He was nervous.

A nurse entered and asked, "What are you doing up?"

"Same thing I was doing down, waiting."

"You should be resting. Where is your bride?"

"Coming, I understand she's coming."

Satisfied, the nurse left. The Filipino nurse, as unpretty and tiny as could be, stuck her head back in the door and giggled, "How nice you smell today, Mr. Tildeh."

Emily did come shortly with her roommate, the Mother of Many, the four kids, a jail chaplain (with collar) to perform the ceremony, and flowers from downstairs, the Cedar-Sinai gift shop. She was dressed in her museum best, gloves and hat and lipstick, a dress of many colors rather than the traditional white. She would be after as before the marriage in the sense that the marriage would never be consummated, but not so in the sense that she would be recognized as a widow rather than a spinster.

Emily had taken to telling Shorty's story on herself; "I have a hermit pole in the desert, near Palm Springs, but I've been so busy, I only get there on weekends, a time share actually."

As the song speaks of "stockings hung from the chimney with care," so the kids, natural but mostly foster, were presented as a group, a row with names, well decorated in mostly red and green, a well presented yet tightly controlled array of little packages not yet serious enough to warrant being under the tree.

"You must be being good, kids, since you're all still cute," Shorty greeted them. Only he and the kids really understood but the adults did not question it.

So the room was filled with Shorty, standing and sometimes sitting at the edge of the bed, and Emily, and the Mother of Many, dressed in what looked like might have come from the Salvation Army thrift shop, although it was fine, and four kids, still cute. And there was the young chaplain, whom Shorty had never met. There'd been no rehearsals, special dispensations

with paperwork, and a small pink and white and yellow cake from John the Cook.

There were the essentials, flowers, ring, consents, witnesses, and the parson whose head wobbled ever so slightly throughout the introductions and the ceremony, as it did all the time. Facing the step into eternity soon, and the step into what is normally a start of a new life in life at that very moment, he thought not so much of death or marriage but nudged Emily with a whisper, "Why does the parson's head wobble?" The question was not demeaning, and there were no snickers, just an honest question that went unanswered. Shorty's curiosity had grown with his faith, as if maybe God planted clues.

"Reverend Kevin Hibler, he's a gentleman and a scholar and a chaplain and a friend, recently ordained to the ministry and going to be a Bishop someday," she said proudly.

"Oh," said Shorty, trying to sound impressed. "Thank you for coming, Parson."

"We should have invited the caretaker at the church on 6th - he's the only minister type I know to speak of, besides you. I've gotten to know him and talk to him, apologized for scaring him that first day - did I ever tell you that?"

"No. You always wanted to sit on the back row whenever we go to church."

"Parsons and doctors scare me, if it be known. Where's Doc?"

"Doc said he couldn't make it - emergency at the emergency room, the emergency room doctor got sick with the flu and he had to substitute. He called me, apologized. He had only a day's notice and they couldn't find a substitute for the substitute."

"Ox and his and theirs were coming but...I don't know where they are."

The minister excused himself.

"We'll wait just a little longer," said Shorty. "If the parson's meter is too much for waiting, we'll call the church and tell 'em the price was too high - the parson you sent, his head wobbles, that's too much if the parson's head is gonna wobble."

"He's a friend of mine, shush, next topic, fur-ball already."

But Shorty persisted. "You pray for some and they get well, and you pray for others and they stay sick. The parson's got to be...well, in, he's the parson. Why did that contrary guy, the Glitch, the thief and more, did every crime, you pray for him,

he gets up and out of bed in a day. But the parson's head wobbles. Why is that? I don't understand that."

"I don't either."

"I'm nervous."

"I am too. We bless and intercede in all directions, and try to understand more as we do. We try to put the Lord's brush strokes on His art work around us and we're not supposed to worry so much about why the parson's head wobbles. If being contrary was enough, you'd be well in no time. I don't understand everything, but I do believe the Tide is rising. Behave, I don't care if you are sick."

"The parson's not going to sing, is he?"

"We're in a hospital. The minister is not going to sing."

"Good. If he'd sang, then the parson's warble would have wobbled, and that would never do, I suppose."

"Oh, groan," said the bride.

"On the other hand, is a warble supposed to wobble? Maybe this parson could warble better than any you ever..."

"Oh," interjected Emily.

"If Marvin were a little older, he could...I think Marvin may make the preacher," said Shorty.

"Lately, Marvin wants to be a pilot. Everything is airplanes. Airplanes going up, airplanes crashing down, airplanes on the floor, in the bed, in the cereal bowl, in the bathtub, airplanes everywhere, and talk of the Red Baron."

"Airplanes are a blessing but the rocket scientist can send a firecracker to the moon with people in it, yet he can't do a thing for the soul once it is in the grave. That's going to be our next Bible lesson. I think they're old enough for a little more serious topic, the death is bad topic," Emily announced.

Marvin the pilot was the most affectionate. The others were a little distant after brief hello's and hugs.

"You brought Toots with dainty little shoes - good, I'm not strong enough if her legs were fully armed. Why couldn't you just marry us?"

"Doesn't work that way," Emily explained.

"Oh."

The kids had little room to fidget in and soon wanted a story.

"Tell us again the story, the story about the `Snatching of Bookie Bob, Elmo." "Elmo" had become the children's name for Shorty, which was what Robert called himself.

"Not today, kids, not today. Got to get married today."

"I wish your mother could have come."

"The news of me dying would not kill her, but the news of me getting married might. She is old, and we're not that close. But it would have been..."

"I wish we'd had time to work on that. My dad would have come but there was no time."

"No disrespect for the situation or circumstance or whatever you call it, but between the kids fidgeting, and my hand fidgeting, and the parson's head gonna be shaking, I know it, when he comes back in, I'd just as soon get all this fidgeting over with, then we can chase off everybody, and start out honeymoon, which is to say have a nice talk about whatever we want to talk about. I can't stand too long."

The Mother of Many took out a camera and began to take pictures. "Do you want to memorialize this, maybe a poor choice of words. I suppose it needs to be done. By the time you get the pictures developed, I wonder what I'll look like, whether I'll be more developed than my pictures, that's the question, that's the rub."

"Oh," said Emily.

"When it gets to the part...does anybody here know any reason why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony, somebody ought to jump up and say, `Cause she's pretty and he's as ugly as can be.' Well, I got me a pretty bride. I don't know how. Think it was because I told her I was gonna leave her all my money."

The parson came and the ceremony quickly began, part wedding, part cheerful dirge. The ceremony began with a discussion of the Father.

"Father, we are gathered here, today," began the minister, "gathered here today to perform a ceremony that is much discussed in your Scriptures. Father, we know there is not a natural father here today to give away the bride, but we acknowledge that you are the real Father of the bride, and surely your presence is enough. You are in fact the Father of the bride and bridegroom."

And we trust that it is your will to give Emily away this day. We also acknowledge that somehow, while it is not easily understood, that You stand in special relationship to the Lord as Father and God. The Gospel of John clearly teaches us that the Jesus is divine. The Gospel even begins with this declaration, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Yet the Gospel of John goes on to tell us, seemingly in the first words of the resurrected Christ that You stand in special relationship to the Lord as Father and God. John Chapter 20 tells us that the Lord said to the woman: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." We praise your Son in your presence, Father, and we praise You."

He sighed and continued: "This is something of a mystery in that these words speak of the Lord like You, God, yet like us, with brothers, yet not like us in that He had no natural father, only the conception born of your Spirit as predicted in the old Scriptures and recorded in the new. It is such a delicate balance, how You worked the work of redemption in sending the Lord on such terms and in such a way that redemption is accomplished and a bride found for Your Son, Father. We know that the Scriptures speak of Jesus as the Bridegroom, now in heaven awaiting the final delivering up of His bride, the church. We sometimes call Him the heavenly Bridegroom, yet know it will not always be so, for the Scriptures say He is coming back...and then for a bride without spot or wrinkle. We know death and grave clothes will pass away, and death, defeated, will have to admit defeat."

Shorty shuffled and sat back on the hospital bed a bit before standing again. The minister continued.

"We know, Father, that natural marriage bespeaks the greater one to come, and that even the Heavenly Bridegroom has a heavenly Father, and that You are gathering the Bridegroom a bride, and we see a picture of that even today. We see it even amidst the thermometers and tubes and what have you. You tell your stories over and over again, beautiful redundancies, over and over again yet a little different each time, so no one will miss the story."

"As the father in the parable of the prodigal son stayed at home in the kingdom of life and righteousness, so You stayed at home in a sense, yet being with the Lord whom you sent, the faithful witness of Who You really are. The Scriptures tell us the Father and Son are One, in that we know we do not miss you when we find the Son, yet we cannot find You if we reject the Son. The Scriptures tell us Jesus tasted death for every man, and if I understand correctly, it does not so state of You, Father. Jesus abandoned Himself to death, trusting in You to resurrect Him. You, Father, stayed at home in the kingdom of life, and raised

the Lord to life. We find, for example, the first verse in Galatians, Paul speaking: 'Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)' We thank you the Lord is risen. We thank you for salvation. We thank you for repentance. We thank you both Emily and Shorty are believers."

"In the Hebrew cycle of festivals, visible celebrations and reminders of God's work, repeated over and over again, year by year, there was one festive called the Passover, where the blood was sprinkled on the doorpost. Death passed over those that had made covenant with God. It is the blood of the lamb that is the redemption price of the bride. It was the Hebrew custom to read on the Passover the Song of Solomon, a book wherein the bride at times laments her past. But the king, the bridegroom, does not bring to the bride talk of her shortcomings but only of her beauty. Such is the Lord's redemption. Such is the Lord's forgiveness. Such is His ability to beautify the bride, which is the church."

Shorty began to fidget. The minister's head wobbled a little more but he continued.

"Time has its limits and had to have limits. There was a time and one time only when the Lord punched a hole out of the kingdom of darkness by the cross. There will be a time and one time only when the Lord returns for His bride. There is a time allotted for us to do the work of God, which is to believe in the Son, Whom You sent. John 6:29. There was a time allotted to the exhaustion of the curse, and eternity allocated to the blessing for those that are the Lord's. And while here we do have part of the Lord's blessing, I judge our time is limited. Revelation 10:6 speaks of the end of time, and I believe it is good to contemplate the end of time when time will have fulfilled its purpose of bringing us back to the Lord to spend eternity with Him. But I don't think that time is now. I judge that we have rather little time for the task at hand, the pleasant task for binding these two together in marriage. A wedding ring is not only a reminder to the parties but a memo to other suitors that the covenant of marriage has been entered into with consent. And the ring...No the ring later, sorry. I was going to read a poem too. I'll read part of it."

The rather intellectual city parson read the latter half of a poem by a very intellectual country parson named George Herbert:

When I had forgot my birth,
 And on earth
In delights of earth was drown'd;
God took blood, and needs would be
 Spilt with me,
And so found me on the ground.

Having rais'd me to look up,
 In a cup
Sweetly he doth meet my taste.
But I still being low and short,
 Far from court,
Wine becomes a wing at last.

For with it alone I fly
 To the sky
Where I wipe mine eyes, and see
What I seek, for what I sue;
 Him I view,
Who hath done so much for me.

Let the wonder of this pity
 Be my ditty,
And take up my lines and life:
Harken upon pain of death,
 Hands and breath;
Strive in this, and love the strife.

"I didn't understand all that," said Shorty, taking liberty to interrupt the ceremony, "but I think I'm getting a bit of the kiss off before I get to kiss the bride."

"No, it is a poem about the Lord," said Emily.

"It was difficult to find words for this unusual occasion."

"I'm not offended, they were just fine. I do need to sit a minute."

When he'd rested, the actual ceremony, as opposed to the preliminary commentary, began. The ceremony was as the custom till it got to the "till death do us part" directed to the bride, at which Shorty interjected, "That may only tie her up till Tuesday, Parson." In due time, the rings got exchanged.

Ox and his and hers, theirs and one neighbor's kid who needed looking after for the afternoon, came just as the ceremony closed. The room was too small for so many, and turns were taken in congratulations.

Olive was quite shy and her public prayers quite tiny. The culture was one that discouraged womanly prayers in public, and so her tiny prayers had also been few. This was changing. She herself was not thin, a more than mid-sized woman when not compared to Ox. One knows one is better when one is less prone to drowning. "Where is the lifeguard? Where is the oxygen mask?" Need, need, need. Olive, when she first came, was all need, a sign of the lack of the Spirit in the life. A woman

dying of thirst yet drowning, such was Olive when she came. Her needs were so severe that she had almost no words or thought except those centered on her own needs. This is true even though she was a mother. As an airline employee says that with the emergency, the mother is to take the oxygen mask before helping the child, such was the order of the day at the mission. One must have more wherewithal than need, something that overflows, something to share over and above, and Olive had come to that stage, both as to her family and others.

Olive began, "Lord, the oil and wine. Thank you." She paused, then the want-to overcame the shyness with a burst: "And, Lord, I thank you for what you are doing here today, whatever it is, Lord you know. Thank you for Emily being a missionary of your kindness, and Shorty's helping Ox get a job, and for Emily and Shorty, and...well, pour out the oil and wine, Lord. Amen. Congratulations to you both."

"I say so too," said Ox.

"Save the price of a stamp, mail in your congratulations and your condolences in the same envelope," Shorty joked. "No toasters, please, anything that takes three minutes to do its thing may be too long."

As the chaplain, parson, left, Shorty gave him a nice compensation in cash. "Doc was supposed to be the best man, and do this, I think. I couldn't find an envelope and don't know how this is done, so if this isn't how it's done, well, maybe I'll do better next time. And the poem was fine. I don't give a half a penny that you started in the middle so long as you finished. Don't mind me, I've not been myself lately and don't plan to be myself for long anyway, that is, assuming I find myself before I...well, go."

"It was a pleasure to meet you."

"Thank you."

Shorty announced, after the parson left, "I read the poem, and he started in the middle. He didn't read the whole poem, probably figured I wouldn't make it through a whole poem. I may be short but I'm wiry, and I could have made it through a whole poem. I'm only going to get married once, I don't know about you, but I'd a kinda liked to have had a whole poem...The parson's head wobbles and he doesn't give you a whole poem, I think I overpaid him. I'm not a rich man."

They spent their honeymoon afternoon in chairs and prayers and naps, Shorty sitting and napping in his red beret, which he'd thought a bit much for the ceremony, although the matter was discussed. The honeymoon night was the same. Except for the

occasional medication, they were undisturbed, except that around dusk Angel and her husband came to visit, and just before that, J.B. from the mission wheeled in Herself, Old Sourdough, grinning ear to ear, enjoying her ride in the hospital wheelchair. They'd come in a taxi.

Emily shared that she had been reading a biography of Chopin, and how Liszt led Chopin to the Lord in the last days of Chopin's life. She shared the memory of being on a high hill in a mariner's chapel in Singapore, visiting her father, and the beautiful view of the port. She shared her teenage memory of the mountain village in Malaysia and the rapid, dirty stream that passed at the edge of the town.

They read 'a Kempis. They read Scripture, especially David's Psalm Eighteen which was Shorty's favorite. Shorty loved any story having to do with little King David, and he felt not too sorry for Saul, the king whom David replaced. Shorty often referred to Saul as "Too Tall Saul." Emily would correct him; "We're supposed to root for everybody, Shorty, a heart of blessing is a heart of plenty."

They talked of art. Emily did most of the talking. She said, "We have a sense of the scenic in the natural, but we ask the Lord to bring out the sense of the lovely in our Spiritual sight. It is better to peer and inspect and detect the beauty of holiness in a persevering saint than to strain one's eyes at the museum. Yet the Lord can touch a painter, and a soul through a painter. There is no end to the beauty of the Lord's creative word. We are to examine more closely the art of the Lord Himself. Is it not a beautiful thing to see the Lord's quick work in Olive? We are to look around God's creation seeking a fresh walk with Him in His garden, both in the natural and Spiritual, counting beautiful what He calls beautiful - holiness, kindness, an encouraging word, a prayer of rescue in time."

And they talked much of their beloved Corot. She read of Corot talking to his pupil Pissarro, "I have only a little flute, but I try to strike the right note." And Corot saying, "In a painting, there must be one single point of light, unique in its intensity." And of Corot bursting out of the room to catch a floating cloud that he wanted to capture. Shortly before his death, Corot complained that he'd never been able to capture the sky."

They laughed about their day of first meeting.

"One thing I always wanted to know about women. Are women like men when it comes to entertaining their eyes and their ears. If I have a long phone call, and it is someone I want to talk to, and I'm going to pay attention, I nevertheless will turn on the

tv with the sound off. I can't bear the thought of just listening with nothing to look at. Are girls like that?"

"No," said Emily, astonished. "When we talk on the phone, and have a deep talk, you mean, you were always watching television."

"I was listening too, really."

"Huh. One of life's little mysteries."

"How guys hear and see?"

"No, Shorty." She kissed him.

They laughed at the day Emily went with Shorty to pick out new frames for new lenses, and in the process, he put back on his old frames, "Those are the worst yet," she'd said.

They mused over the story of how Shorty visited a preacher when he was eighteen. The preacher had just told him to read the book of John, but Shorty had gotten away from there so fast that he'd gotten a speeding ticket. He told her other stories, admitting to his now wife, "Before I knew the Lord, me and stupid were this close." He held up two fingers close together.

Shorty drew out some ideas for a doll called Hoop-de-doo, which would have a hoop around the middle, and a voice that would say "Well, Hoop-de-doo" for "well done" and the same phrase with a different intonation for ridicule. It was just the beginning of an idea.

They laughed at a Luke 19 joke they had between them. The Lord comes to every one individually, often in a unique way. Zacchaeus was short of stature and had to climb a tree to see the Lord. Upon seeing tiny Zacchaeus up a tree, the Lord told him that He'd abide in his house that day. The joke was one Emily admitted she'd thought of it early but only judged to bring the joke up well into their friendship, the first day he visited her at the mission.

"Shorty, has anyone ever told you, 'Oh, go climb a tree'?"

"Sure, means get lost," said Shorty.

"Well, if they say it to you around the mission, they are evangelizing you."

It was their joke, and the phrase had stayed. As their relationship matured, the phrase "go climb a tree" had taken on the meaning of "Seek the Lord on it," or "Pray on it." It was Emily's response to Shorty's marriage proposal, but he knew "Oh, go climb a tree" meant "Have you prayed about it?"

When he first heard the story of Zacchaeus, it stayed with him particularly because, he told Emily, "When I was a kid, I remember the first tree I climbed. It was so hard to get up, they had a hard time getting me down. I sat up there and threw leaves and branches and anything I could get my hands on up there."

Emily read the Scripture from Jeremiah about healing balm in Gilead. "'Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?'"

"Do you suppose the parson's head wobbles ...? Naw. Where is Gilead anyway?"

Shorty was gone, not just gone from the hospital, three days after the marriage.

There is a carving in stone at the Chicago Art Institute depicting the loneliness of the soul, circular in that those carved nearly touch. They bend in circular fashion as they reach from figure to figure, but they do not quite touch. And in that sense, every mortal dies alone.

Yet He did not die alone in the sense that he died in the Lord. Emily and I were there also.

Shorty told no one of his illness, not even Emily, until the illness told of itself. There was some resolution of the soul, some parliamentarian of these things that got its charging orders from bad philosophy and Mickey Spillane and other mystery writers, a gavel to wood and roll call of one within Shorty that resolved that it was appropriate to die alone and not bother anyone with the inevitable.

Shorty died well in the sense of mercifully, physically, with little pain, and with courage. He died mercifully in the sense that he died in the Lord, else this story would not be told. I witness to you that Shorty died well but imperfect, as did Corot.

The man of dust is not the final man. When sin is complete, when sin has its final say, it brings forth death, says the Scripture, but that's not the end of the story. There is no process within death that will reverse itself but that's not the end of the story. When the heart stops beating and the breath of life leaves the body, that's not the end of the story but only the beginning.

Chapter 23

A fraction of an interest pouring over a whole situation, the result not dividing or multiplying or adding up. One night, over a sermon, she brushed it aside and said, "There's better work of that than I can do tonight."

Emily had a large pile of papers on a desk she'd moved into Shorty's condo. "So many people want death certificates! How can such a small estate generate so much paper work?," she wondered aloud. She had to mail a large envelope to the city, and struggled to see the right postage as the large envelope hung over the edges of the very small scale.

She complained, "When I said I'd marry him, he asked me to consider if I could afford to bury him. Maybe, maybe I should have listened." Then she cried. During those days, crying was often and the cries often turned to weeping.

Puppies and playthings. Shorty often brought the latter to the kids and threatened to bring the former, but never did. There was not the time or place, inside the house or outside on the mission grounds. It was Toots that wanted a pet, and Emily knew that Shorty would have thought about that topic when he made out his will, a silly thing that doesn't belong in wills, although in olden days people in wills disposed of important things that are now considered ordinary. The topic was not there in the document but Emily somehow knew that Shorty would have amused himself with the thought of bequeathing a puppy to the kids. Before he babysat, Shorty was to the kids a puzzlement. After he babysat, he was a puzzlement to be reckoned with. But he became a friend to the kids the day he took everyone to the dog show.

For a man of modest means, Shorty was a man of many clothes, all of which went to the mission closet, except for his red beret. This included his favorite pair of old shoes, which he'd repaired many times over and which he called "Comfort." It included a new pairs of shoes too tight despite two times on the cobbler's shoe trees for stretching. These he wore but he called them "Discomfort." These fit John the Cook who also got an arm full of sox in the deal.

Shorty's will was actually a short, two page trust, wherein Shorty left his golf clubs to Ox and \$2,000 for the "care of Wayne the Philosopher," to be doled out at the rate of \$100 a month. At Emily's insistence, his other liquid assets went to his mother but it turned out there weren't any after burial expenses. His car was towed away by a charity. His library of detective stories found the dumpster and was picked up by the trucker from Long Beach who had also disposed of Shorty's hairs after they made the floor of the Korean barber shop.

Sister Emily inherited little but the Bunker Hill condo, but there was life insurance that paid off the mortgage.

She took off only a week to marry and bury her husband, then one day for the move.

She moved in with the help of Ox and four who were part of the men's program at Hope for Homeless Youth. There was one with an all-off haircut and tatoos that seemed to spread from the neck to down and about the wardrobe, but all were conspicuous and all met with mostly raised eyebrows from the residents of Bunker Hill. There are raised eyebrows that may go up and down with the music, as one sees in conductors and others who've lived long with the same music, but these were raised eyebrows that stayed up with the wide open eyes, an expression not so much of condescension as surprise. "What!," said the eyebrows with the eyes.

There was a lurch of measurable proportions when a toddling dowager got on the elevator with her caregiver to be greeted by perfectly likable young man with his arms full of boxes of Bible stories and missionary memorabilia. Even the little dog gave out a warning that had to be quieted: "Quiet, Byron, hold on, quiet," said the caregiver lady, "we're almost home."

Family relations and this young man had progressed from the bumper car stage to the shouting and throwing stage to the indifference stage, then he left Iowa and came to reside with Hope for Homeless Youth. The young man, Daniel, was missing some of his lower lip but could have won a smiling contest. A dictionary definition of "untoward" says "unmanageable," which was the old Daniel, but Daniel had become "toward" and with the direction, manageable, even helpful, even friendly.

There was a late afternoon time amid boxes and books and pictures piled inside the bottom floor entrance that it looked like a convention of bikers and bankers. Amid that spectacle was Chaplain Emily, Widow Emily, quite, quite caught up in a grief that she'd not known even when her mother died.

The spectacle on the ground floor at the entrance to Bunker Hill soon passed, although the Judge and Mrs. Judge took to supporting the group, going there to get their picture taken as sponsors of the Hope for Homeless Youth. Mrs. Judge rather liked the idea of being a philanthropist with a specialty amongst those who looked so unlike herself.

But there was a turning of the heart with the experience. The Judge died that year, but the Judge died well. On the way to the cemetery, the procession passed a tow truck towing another tow truck - even judges are themselves judged. Mrs. Judge would make a memorial gift, a generous endowment that the group recognized by hanging the picture of Mr. and Mrs. Judge on the walls. A

picture of the picture made the downtown newspaper, along with the story of how much the work had done to lessen the crime rate in the neighborhood.

But such things are ill planned and fragile. Most trails of kindness are unseen, as if small traces in the sand brushed over by a light branch, but that is not to say that they go unnoticed, for the ripples go forth and change things. And that is also not to say that there is not a record.

On her second day in Bunker Hill, Widow Emily walked each of the floors and prayed silently for every one of her new neighbors. No part of the earth can hide from the Lord's declarations, not even the rich who are holed up at Bunker Hill.

Emily as a vessel had been overflowing for years and filling other vessels with the Spirit, and she found the oil had a constancy even in widowhood, even as the widow who came to Elisha who was told to gather vessels, not a few.

Chapter 24

It was shortly after Widow Emily moved into Bunker Hill that there was a dark, cold, late February Wednesday in which the Lord led Pastor Ambleard to open up his church around ten p.m. He thought he was to get some lost notes left on the pulpit, but the Lord had brought him there for another reason.

Pastor Ambleard was a renowned man of many years in the ministry, a frequent speaker at conventions of leaders, known as a man of many words who painted carefully the word pictures he sought to display. "When I say this, I didn't mean to go all the way over here and say this," he would say, putting a brush stroke in this corner. "Note that I didn't say this either," and more brush strokes. By the time he was through, he'd put on quite a few brush strokes and painted a picture with care, one he thought all could see and not get distorted.

But the Lord had brought him here this night to make a brief talk to quite another group. The pastor had a janitor-staffer open up and turn on the lights of the pie-slice shaped sanctuary that tapered out sharply as one left the pulpit and choir area. "I'll close up, won't be ten minutes, thanks," said the pastor to the staffer as he left.

As he looked behind the pulpit for his notes, the Lord spoke to the pastor from the wings, "Jack."

"Yes, Lord," said the pastor, surprised, but not too surprised, for the Lord had spoken to him before.

"I have brought you here tonight to address a gathering of angels, those who do my bidding, those who guard, and report the stories of my work in the lives of those whom they guard."

"A gathering...a convention."

"Yes, a convention, if you will," said the Lord, from the wings, unseen.

"A convention of guardian angels. Oh, my, I didn't know there was such a thing. A convention of guardian angels, but I cannot see..."

"Does not the Song of Solomon say that the church, my bride, has dove's eyes, the eyes of the Spirit. Read, you know the place."

The pastor took a Bible from under the pulpit and read from Song 1:15, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes."

With the reading, Pastor Jack's eyes were opened by the Lord, and he saw that the sanctuary was not only filled with an angelic host but with the visible glory of God. It took minutes before Pastor Jack gathered himself to speak. The angels were many but actually, to be specific, only about a thousand. It was a small convention, a local convention of guardian angels if you will, although it had no official title. Angels just come when called.

Philosophers have asked, "How many angels fit on the head of a pin?" a no-good-use silly question that has long gone unanswered because it need not be answered or asked. But at this point in our story, dear reader, you do in fact need to know how many guardian angels gathered at Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, during mid-week, and the answer is about a thousand. The angels were large (some taller than others) but unwinged (winged angels gather in larger facilities), bright and beautiful.

The praise portion of the evening had been going on for hours. Pastor Jack was called, although he did not know it, for one special portion of the evening's service.

"Jack, I have brought you here to give a brief speech. You are allotted only fifteen seconds."

"Fifteen seconds, Lord, I have rarely given a speech in fifteen minutes. I am known for my rather lengthy talks of so many points, many illustrations, down to earth but heavenly, some touches of the erudite. How am I supposed to give a talk in fifteen seconds?"

"Have faith."

"Why bother, why bring me here bodily, if only for fifteen seconds?" Then the Pastor, very learned in Scriptures, pondered out loud the question he'd raised, to see if he could answer it before the Lord did. "Now if you'd brought me here in the spirit man only, well, the Scripture says that the body without the spirit is dead. Samuel was raised at the beckoning of Saul, but after Samuel was dead, if you take that passage quite literally. There is some mention ..."

"Remember, Jack, you've been allotted fifteen seconds of the program. The angels have work to do. They guard people. Their time is precious."

"I usually illustrate a sermon with some stories of how you have dealt with me, Lord, how you have showed me my shortcomings. I am known to be very transparent. People come to hear me in part because they know I am transparent." At that, Pastor Jack looked down at his body and found that he was in fact transparent, in a different sense, and the light of the Lord from the wings shone

right through him. "How did you do that, Lord?," asked Pastor Jack, astonished at the sight of not seeing himself but rather seeing himself transparently.

"I do not tell you everything, Jack," was the response from the wings.

"Whatever the point of the message, I'm sure I'll have stories to add."

From the audience, third row, came an interjection from an angel whose height was less than his fellow conventioners. Only his voice could be heard, but it boomed: "We were there when the Lord created the heavens and the earth. We were there singing at the original creation. You think you've got stories. We've got stories!"

"And its our convention!," came another angelic voice with an edge on it. This angel had been the guardian of Job's wife. He was one not long for nonsense when he could help it. It was Job's wife who counseled Job to "curse God and die," and her guardian had had to put up with much nonsense, both then and now that he was assigned to southern California woman, a ...well, the denomination shouldn't matter. The angel was assigned to a respectable woman of assets and fine family nearly grown, a woman with options, a woman with time to spare, but she watched soap operas incessantly, taped them, repeated them, read about them, and talked about them. It was a vexation to watch the woman live out her sins through others to the rejecting of the exciting things of the Lord's kingdom. The angel had been heard to admit to a fellow guardian, "I'd like to just smack her." Of course he didn't. It isn't allowed. It was just talk. At a convention, one winds down a bit. But you understand the situation, and why the angel's voice had a sharpness that would still a room, even a room of angels.

"Oh," said Pastor Jack.

"And that is why we came today. We came to hear a report from one of our own," resounded the voice of the angel from the third row, too short to be heard amid the taller angels.

"Yes," resounded a cry from the entire audience.

"His name is Boswell. We came to hear a report from a recording angel, a guardian angel, named Boswell," came a cry from an angel on the back row.

"Yes," said Pastor Jack. "I didn't fully understand. Was he named after the biographer of Samuel Johnson, the fountainhead of biographers?"

"Boswell was named for him," came the answer, from one of the angelic crowd on the front row.

"Did he guard Boswell?"

"No," came the answer from an angel on the front row. That "No" came with an edge on it that visibly frightened Pastor Jack.

"If an angel's name is Boswell and a writer's name is Boswell, who do you suppose had the name first?," continued the angelic voice with a ring most unlike a church-bell.

"You do not know how these things work, not fully," said the Lord.

From the crowd came another explanation, but from many different angels speaking in turn although it was a single discourse. "We take our assignments from the Lord. We usually follow family lines. If someone dies childless, his or her guardian angel is assigned according to the progeny of kindness arising from the person's life. Our speaker today was assigned to Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, the artist, but when he died without natural children, he was assigned to one of the orphans supported by Corot's kindness. A descendant of one of those orphans recently died without natural children, but he left a progeny of kindness behind. No doubt, Lord willing, Boswell will be assigned to that family line, the progeny of kindness that this one named Robert, or Shorty, left behind."

"He was unmarried?," asked Pastor Jack.

"No, he died married, but childless," came the answer from me, Boswell, your narrator. "I am just a little late because I have escorted Shorty to heaven. He was Stoic and tending toward quiet in natural life, but he is not that anymore. It took some time to quieten him down."

"Do you angels stay around to comfort the widow?," asked Pastor Jack, who is also famous for his curiosity.

Came the answer from the wings, "She does not need to be touched by an angel but by Me. I will lift her grief and comfort her and soon. She has taught many to pray, and the prayers of many she has taught to intercede rise up to Me daily for her. I will call her to the mountain top, as in the Song of Solomon: `Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.' And she will respond to Me as the Shulamite from the Song, `Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.'"

I, Boswell, had been assigned to give Pastor Jack his specific instructions. "You gave a series of sermons on angels to your congregation. We are angels, and do not need a long sermon. You understand that we know more of that topic than you know. You are asked to give the gist of that series in fifteen seconds."

"Well," said Pastor Jack, "I suppose the gist is this: I told my congregation that angels are messengers not companions. There are types of angels in Scripture. There are guardian angels, recording angels, etc. Don't be fooled by bad angels who lie to you and tell you the Lord sent them to be your companions. Don't worship or pray to or pal around with angels. Pray to God. Seek His face."

At the miracle of the fifteen second sermon by Pastor Ambleard, the hall was filled with praises that cannot be described to natural ears. Let those that have ears to hear, hear.

"You are dismissed, Jack," said the Lord, from the wings. Pastor Jack has his own guardian angel, quite tall, much taller than Pastor Jack, who would make sure of the recording of the miracle of the fifteen second speech. The pastor and his guardian angel left. Ever attentive to the details of the natural, Pastor Jack shut off the lights, as he'd promised the janitor. We didn't need them anyway for the Lord was with us.

I, Boswell, told the gathering the story of Shorty, or Robert, and how he had been a low-down bookie and gambler, and how the Lord snatched him away from the enemy. You have heard most of that story, dear reader, so I will just fill you in on the last portions of what I said to the gathering of my co-workers.

My speech closed as follows. "The unjust judge and his wife went on their way to walk not only in justice but mercy, which are possible only because of the cross. I have been assigned to one who lost his guardian angel when he wanted no more of God and his angels, but with kindness and intercession, I will be about the Lord's business in matters concerning one named Wayne the Philosopher, whose heart only the Lord can open."

I retired to the audience. There was one last report from Widow Emily's guardian angel, who briefly reported the following progress. "The one whom I guard at the direction of the Lord, praise His name, has made real progress in the area of guarding her mouth. The Lord has led her to a sanctified life. She is saintly as can be, one who blesses in all directions, a woman of faith and mercy. Yet her mouth was a problem, there was a string, a phrase of ill repute, we all have heard it as we go about our work."

"I have cast Emily's sins into the sea of forgetfulness," came the Lord's reminder from the wings.

"Yes, of course, or we would be out of work. But we all know what Sister Emily calls people who cut her off on the freeway. Well, I can report that she has not used that foul phrase in many months, not even during this time of grief. The Lord has set her free!"

Praises filled the sanctuary, as they do at all our conventions.

The End, although the story is not finished, or toward The End in the same sense as that of the Scripture's last verse;

"May the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ be with you all. Amen."