



## Dedication

To Nancy, Amy, Lori,  
Elizabeth, Sava, Judith and  
Patricia, who helped me find  
the lyrics to my life's song  
when I was no longer able to  
hear it's melody.

You listened to God when he  
asked you to join my journey  
and hold the shattered pieces  
together enabling the next  
step.

Without you, I, nor this book  
would exist. You have my  
humble but eternal gratitude.



# The Nook

Written

and Illustrated

By

Tina M. Blackledge

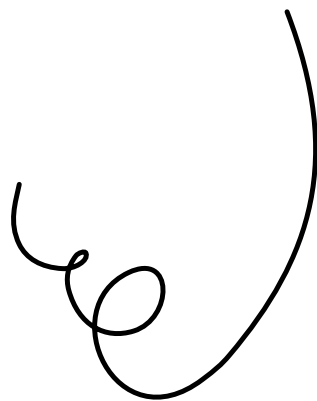
A child of Christ our Savior and Lord

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## Author's Note

This tale is told from the perspective of a child who grows into an adult by its conclusion; hence, you will see different ages of the main female character, Emma. Likewise, note that the Father character, or Jesus, is represented by several different ethnic heritages to illustrate that God is the father of all humanity. Further, this story is a work of fiction based on scriptural truths and upon the life and times of its author. The theological truths are taken from the protestant beliefs of Christianity. My hope and prayer is that the reader will glean understanding of the purpose pain serves and why and how it coexists within the Father's creation.



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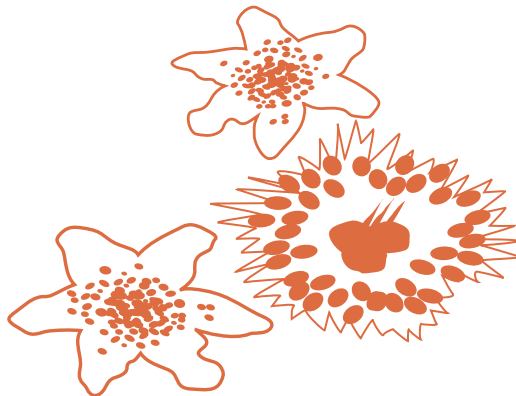
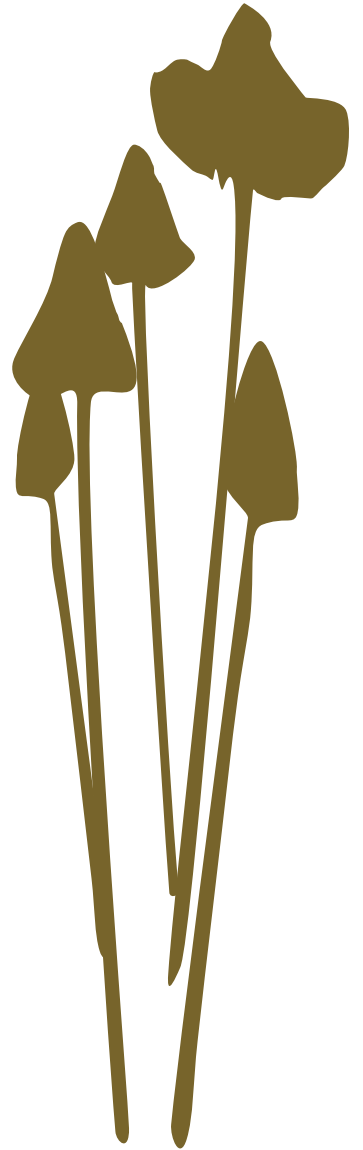
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## Chapter One

### The Nook

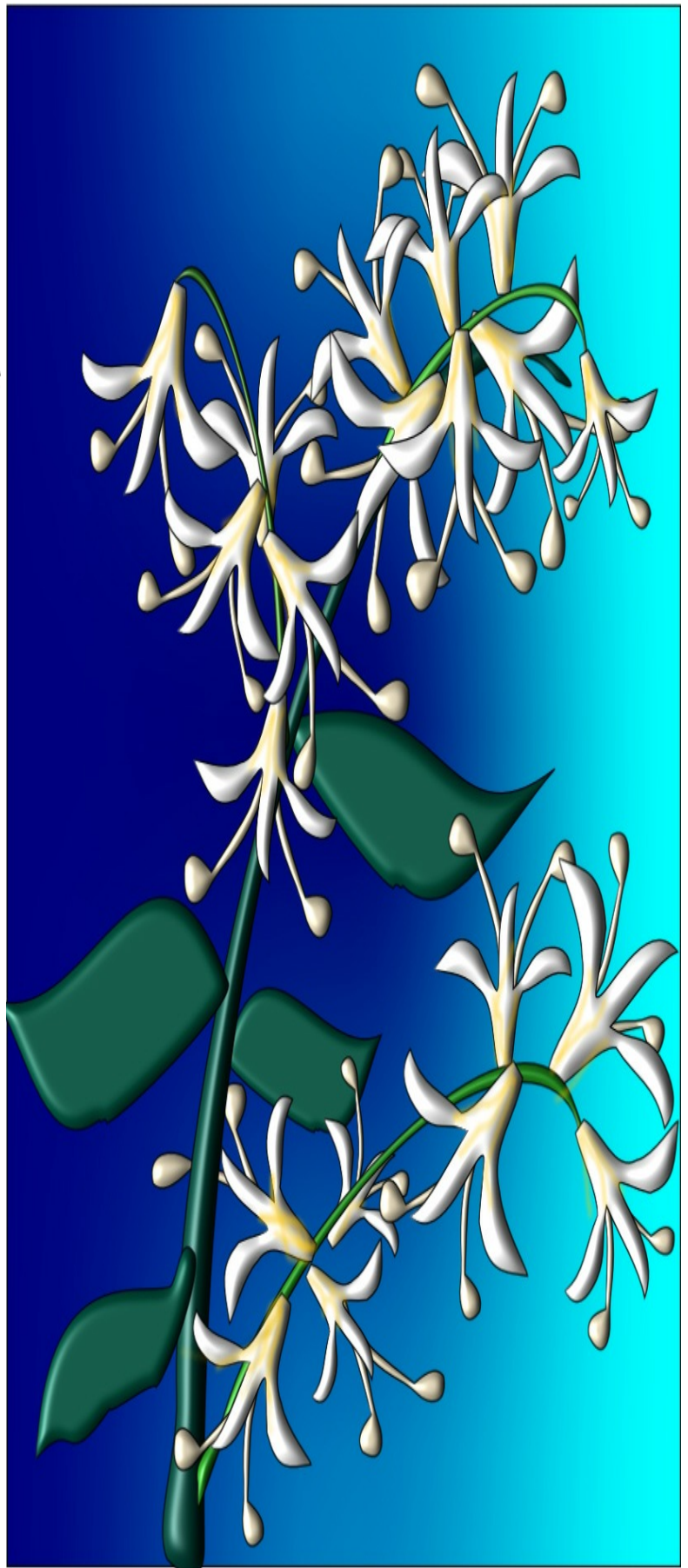
Night shadows scurried to their daytime resting places, under rocks, behind the great trees and into the darkest corners of the Nook. As was their morning custom, thousands of brilliant rays of light tickled the shadows into a hasty retreat defining the wonders hidden within.

One creature after another began to stir eager to bin the day anew. A family of soft gray bunnies emerged from their hutch. A mama, a papa and two wee babies stretched and gave a mighty yawn signaling the mealtime procession to begin. An emerald green patch of crisp clover lay just beyond the crystal brook. The water gently cascaded over, under and around the water-worn pebbles and rocks. A single hop brought the family to dew laden clover patch. Being clever, as rabbits always are, they made sure to be up and about first so they could get to their favorite spot before all others. The rabbit family enjoyed this meal so greatly that they often lingered over it half the morning.



The flying insects that lighted during the night now took flight in an aerial ballet moving ever forward toward the warmth of the sun beyond where two grand oaks stood vigil at the threshold of the Nook.

A melodious symphony offered by hundreds of birds announced the arrival of the new day. As if in answer, the flowers opened their petals revealing a rich harvest of pollen and sweet, juicy nectar.



In the entire Nook, there existed only one area that lay beyond the sunlight so it remained forever in shadow. It rested near the big cave, which sat at the deepest corner. The trees were small and few here as were the rest of the living creatures. Although most in the Nook were afraid to venture here, others considered it a refuge.

Indeed, it was from this very corner that something remarkable would occur today. It was one of those moments that come along once in a very great while, and could only be realized if one was ready at the time of its arrival.

Because things rarely happened in the shadowed area, the day creatures paid little attention to it. In fact, most of the inhabitants of the Nook acted as if it did not exist at all so that is why they were beyond started when strange noises started coming from that part of their home.







Now, the creatures of the night, the wise old owl, the baritone frogs, the chirping crickets, the raccoons, bats and opossum had all heard the sounds coming from the cave throughout the dark hours but were far too fearful to investigate so they ignored the noise and went ahead with their nightly tasks. However, the sounds were getting much closer and louder demanding that the inhabitants pay some attention to them.

As with most creatures, who are afraid of what they do not understand, they agreed that something should be done but they could not decide who should be the doer of what needed to be done. So they hid and waited.

Peering beyond the reach of the sun requires the eyes to adjust to the pitch black darkness. Those who dared strained their eyes searching out the tiniest sliver of light. Shapes, textures and depths dissolved into nothingness but still they stared intently as the sounds grew ever nearer. The unmistakable sound of more than single rock tumbling down the cave



wall sent a shiver throughout ever creature in the Nook. Something was making its way along the path with each step bringing it ever closer to the opening of the cave. Could it be a slimy troll, a fiery dragon, an angry bear or something much worse?

Labored breathing sounded like thunder filtered by the ears of the those it terrified. A curtain of silence, such as the one you cannot hear just before the arrival of a fierce storm, fell on the Nook. An outline of a slight frame stood between the dark and the light as if wondering whether it should take the next step. It was plain to all that it was not a troll, dragon or angry bear.

Only one in the entire Nook was old enough to recognize the being and that was the owl.

"Hoot...Hoot," said the owl. A small human, the owl told everyone. A human child, no less, here in the Nook of all places! What is a human child doing here? They are not supposed to come here, no, not ever.

The bunny family, although thoroughly frightened by this unfamiliar creature, was the first to investigate.



Indeed, the creatures of the Nook were correct, Emma was a frail but strong human girl. She was pleasant enough to look at, as much as any human could be. She was wearing a short white skirt and a red shirt splattered with dots. Her hair was as brown as a squirrel and was sticking out of her head like two crazy tails! Mystic blue eyes and a loving smile graced her countenance.



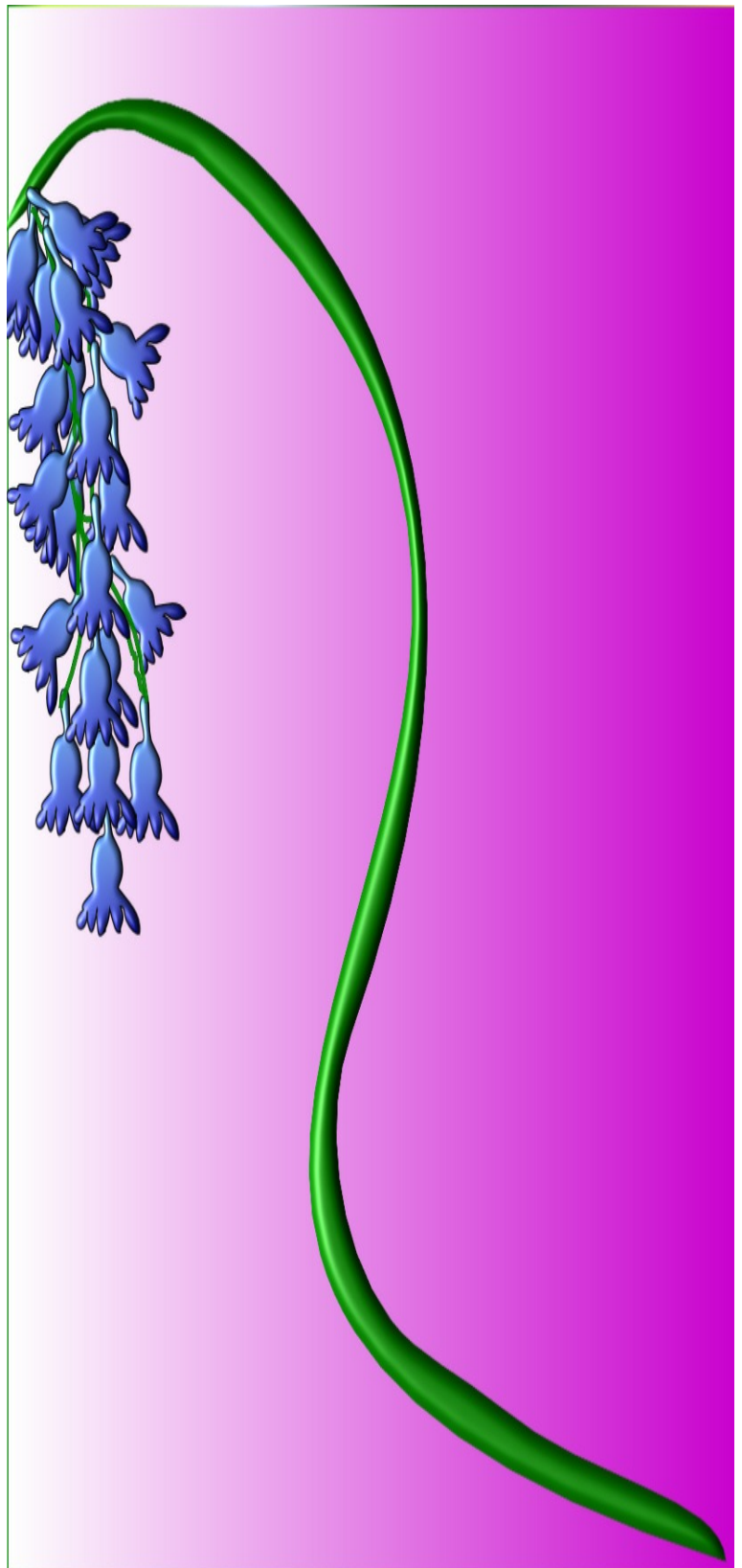
The creatures watched Emma's every awkward movement intently and only dared let their guard down when she found a sun-warmed rock in the center of the Nook upon which to sit.

She appeared very weary but happy at the same time. As the moments expired one after another, Emma sat there soaking in the sun and the beauty that surrounded her. The creatures began to relax and went about their business. After all, many things happened in the Nook that they did not understand so why should they worry about this one human child even if she did come from the dark cave?

Owl told them it was quite odd that the child was alone, for he always saw them with much larger humans. The other creatures were glad it was only this one small human in their home. She did not seem at all dangerous so they ignored her.

The air was saturated with a heavy morning mist creating a blanket of dew laden flowers, leaves and a carpet of grass. A delicate aroma of new honeysuckle blooms and blue bells whispered good morning.

Their greeting carried by a soft breeze teasing the senses of all inhabitants.



As this glorious scene unfolded in front of the child, her labored breathing settled into a calm rhythm. As she relaxed so, too, did the creatures living there. Emma's journey had begun long ago and she was very weary but as the warm morning sun caressed her little body she could feel her limbs release some of their tension.

Both joy and wonder washed over her knowing there was nothing as important as the moment she was in so she let go of the pain her past used to imprison her. You see, Emma did not simply happen upon this place as no one ever could. You dare not venture here without invitation. In fact, you cannot even hear the invitation if you do not believe it exists. Of course, this was not the final destination of anyone's journey. It was an alcove, a glen, a nook where a child could meet his or her Father, when called. It was a place of refuge, rest and tremendous blessing, mercy and wisdom.

Sadly, few are able to see beyond his or her pain to the recognize the beauty shrouded by the shadows of doubt and fear. Yet, without the shadows how would one know there is light? Without pain could there be bliss? Emma did not know the answers to these questions but she was certain that no one could reach this place without vowing to fight his or her own darkness. Each person walks in the darkness thinking they are alone in his or her pain but there are a few who know differently.

Emma knew there was more. No one is ever truly alone especially when hurting. Her Father promised never to leave her or any of his children and that is something she needed to talk to him about.



## Chapter Two

### Broken

It was a cool, rainy day nearer to the end of the calendar than the beginning that greeted Emma's arrival in the world. She was a small infant, who was much loved. On this day of birth, great joy and wonder were celebrated as was the case for many newborns. No one knew that something within the child was broken because it did not show itself. Instead, loving kisses and softly whispered words of love poured onto the infant.

Unfortunately, this, "something" would shape how she and all others would view her place in the world. It was not until the end of her fourth year that her brokenness began to show. Doctor after doctor and test after test marked the time the family had to endure before they could understand what ailment was attacking their young daughter.



Now you must understand, there exists a depth of anguish so deep and dark that it is known only to those who are unable to protect a loved one against an unknown, invisible but certain danger. Emma's parents were now at that depth of fear and sorrow when the doctor's words changed their little girl's life forever.

Emma had something that would not claim her life, news which brought joy and relief to the haggard parents. However, it was a something that would attack her body for the rest of her life causing pain and deformity to go before her.

Upon hearing such news, the mind does not know quite how to react. It has never encountered the situation before so it has no point of reference. Instead, it grasps at pieces of knowledge it already knows and then tries to fit the new stuff into the old. Its kind of like trying to force the wrong puzzle piece into a spot for which it was never made. Ultimately, this creates a problem for the whole puzzle because it can never be completed. From far off, it may look like a complete puzzle picture but it is frail. Brokenness becomes the normal expectation throughout all layers of life.

Emma's young mind could only judge by her parent's reaction and expressions that her brokenness had made them very sad. She could not tell if their sadness was based on her suffering or on theirs but she suspected it was a mixture of both. The practical matters of caring for a sickly child plus the poison of fear would take their toll upon the family as was revealed to her by their constant arguing.

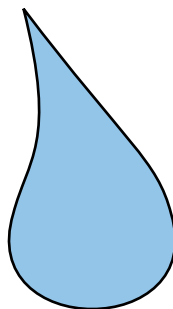
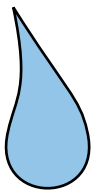
Even the way they looked upon her was different. To be certain, they were smiling and still showered her with words of love but the sadness in their eyes told Emma that whatever was broken in her had somehow broken them too.



She felt deeply responsible for everything bad that was happening to her family so she tried very hard not to be a burden. She pushed herself beyond her limits and then just a little bit more until the pain told her that her body had had enough.

Emma worked hard to hide her illness from all because she knew it made her different and in her world, different was never a good thing to be. If you were different then you stood out, you were considered odd or special and in turn were treated as if you were a little less human than everyone else. She learned quickly that was easier to pretend to be , "fine", than it was to be known as the "sick girl". She tried to be very strong for everyone. Sometimes it worked but at other times she could not control how her body responded to the inflammation, chronic illnesses or pain. Sometimes she just needed to stop, just stop everything.

Those times always sparked an argument between her parents. This not only made her sad but her two sisters as well. Emma thought this was all her fault and felt very guilty. She carried a heavy weight of blame, which was no one's to carry, but she could not help but see the sadness around her and know she was the cause.



Sadness, pain, heartache and fear are many of the things that can cause a person to fall off the path the Father has laid out before them. He, who struggles, can become very angry and hateful to everyone around them but especially to himself. Or that same person can travel through those painful things with their Father instead of without Him and that will bring the person to a very strong faith.

Emma, herself, had become very angry at everything including herself and her Father. She began to hate her life very much and had wished she had never been born. She even would pray to her Father to take her home. She prayed this every night and would become angry when she woke up in the morning. Her Father brought her through these very hard days and nights and her faith grew while her anger lessened but she still had so many questions for Him.

One thing that never changed in Emma was her deep compassion and need to defend those who could not defend themselves. She never gave up on something she put her mind too and she tried really hard to bring happiness to those whose life she touched. Of course, happiness and joy can only be sparked from inside a person but she planted many seeds while trying.



## Chapter 3

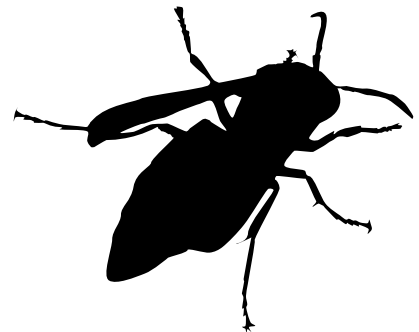
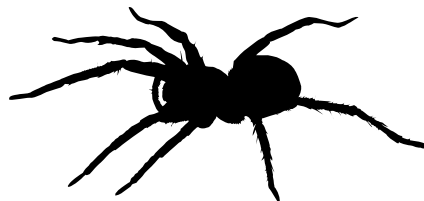
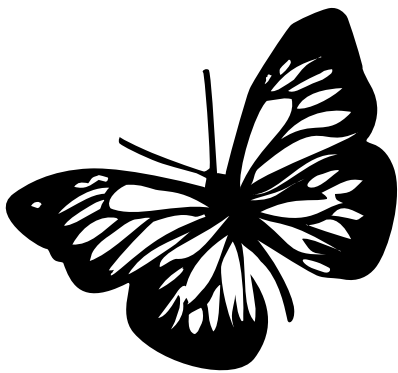
### The Wonder of Difference

Emma did not understand why all the bad things happened but that is what made today so special. One thing was very certain, she would remember this day forever because her Father had asked her to walk with him in this peace-filled garden. It was going to be just the two of them with no interruptions and no busy tasks to distract.

As the warmth radiated into the child's body she thought, "Ah the Father always knows exactly what I need", thanking Him for putting the rock in just the right spot.

Surveying the Nook, she spied a bright green patch of clover served as breakfast to a family of puffy gray bunnies. Emma had to resist the urge to join the woodland family because she knew her approach would disturb their meal. However, she longed to stroke their soft fur.

Further in the Nook, movement caught her eye. The action was so brief and slight that she questioned whether she had seen it all.



There it was again! Her eyes focused in on the spot. Was it a late comer to the breakfast of clover she wondered? It was not large enough to have been a bunny but she could not see what it was from where she was standing.

Emma checked to see if her Father was coming but did not see his approach from any direction so she decided to venture off her warm perch toward the movement. She had always been intrigued by mysteries; therefore, the swaying grass lured her toward it.

The instant she stepped off the rock, pain coursed through her limbs as her warm flesh encountered the cool damp grass. She did not pause but forged ahead acknowledging the pain then quickly dismissing it as she always did. It has been an uninvited nuisance, which she rarely allowed to stop her.

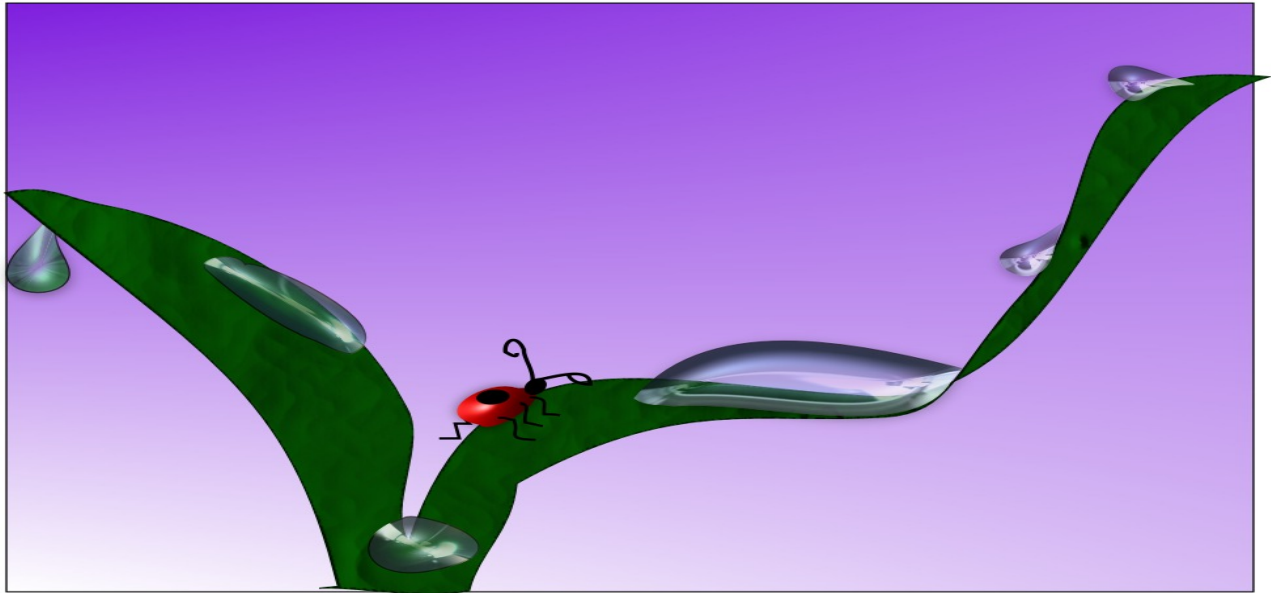




Emma Stooped down sitting upon her feet to investigate the movement. As her eyes focused upon a tiny point, she nearly squealed in delight after discovering a ladybug. This was no ordinary ladybug, for it had but a single spot upon it's back. It was different and for that reason she was instantly enamored of it. She could not take her eyes from it's every effort. However, something was wrong and as she watched, she soon realized it was struggling.

The ladybug was traveling a course toward the tip of the grass blade but he dew-laden leaf formed rivulets washing to the base of the blade over and again.

Emma stopped a gasp from escaping her lips as the insect lost its footing spiraling downward upon a mini whirlpool landing on its back. The effort it was expending was exhausting.

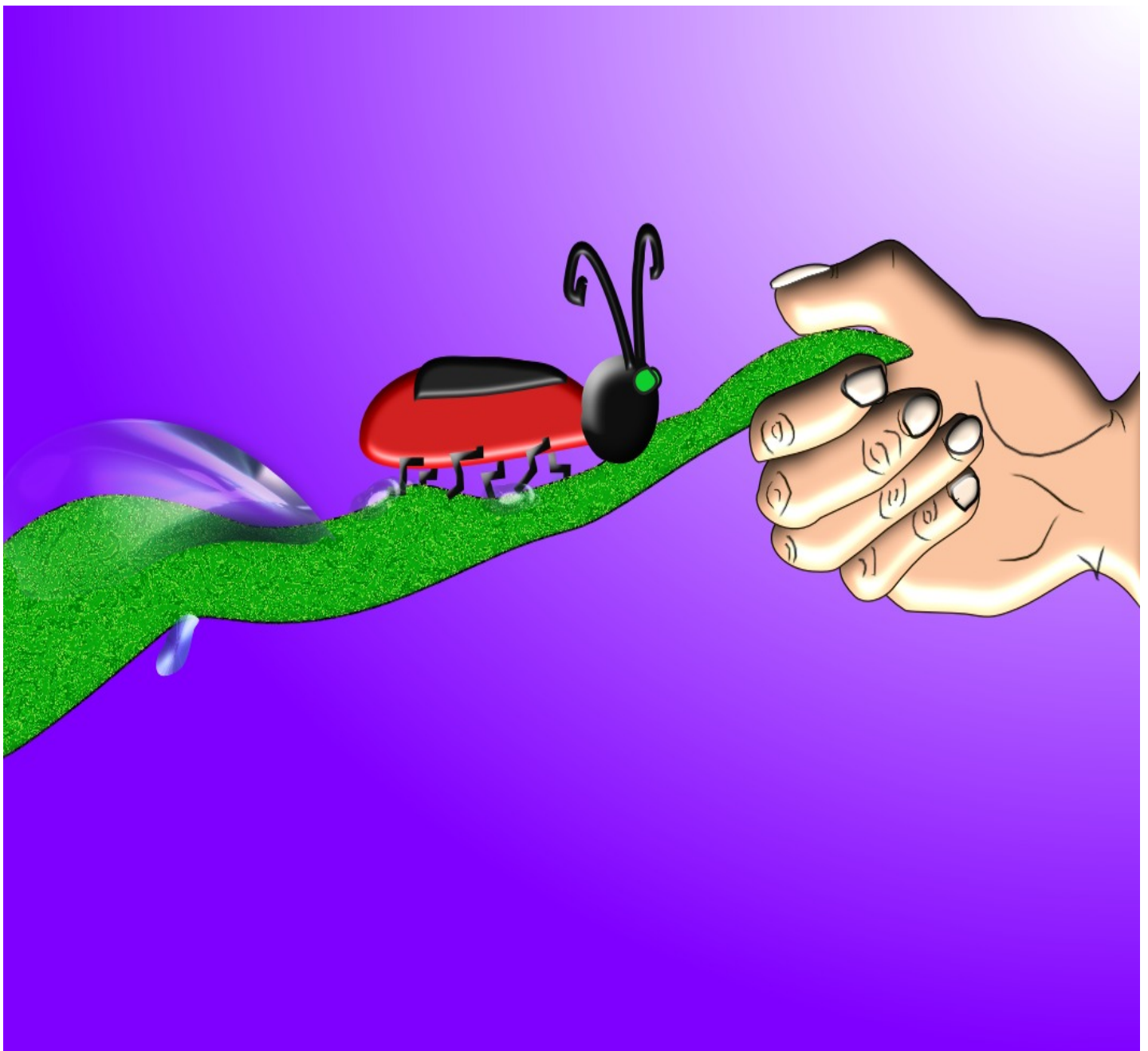


Tears threatened to spill over as Emma felt the pain and frustration the bug was enduring. Her mind raced thinking of how she could help the little bug. If only her Father was there, he would surely know what to do.



The bug had flipped itself over but remained very still for a time. Emma feared that it had died but was relieved to see it begin it's ascent once again. It was a remarkable bug! She had to help but how?

Ah ha! An idea hit her as she spied the sunlit portion of the Nook. There were no sparkles in the grass or on the leaves over there. The sun must have dried up all the dew on those plants. However, the sunbeams were at least two inches from her lady bug's leaf. She thought for a moment then gently grasped the tip of the grass blade pulling it toward the ray of sunshine.



The ladybug froze in it's tracks as the strange movement shook it's world. Emma froze with it holding her breath until the bug felt safe enough to climb further up. Her heart felt as if it would beat from her chest as the bug stopped again at the line of warmth. The sensation was odd to the little bug because it had only known the cold, wet, dampness that always was. Emma knew that the bug would surely perish if it feared to venture toward the light because it had grown so accustomed to the darkness.

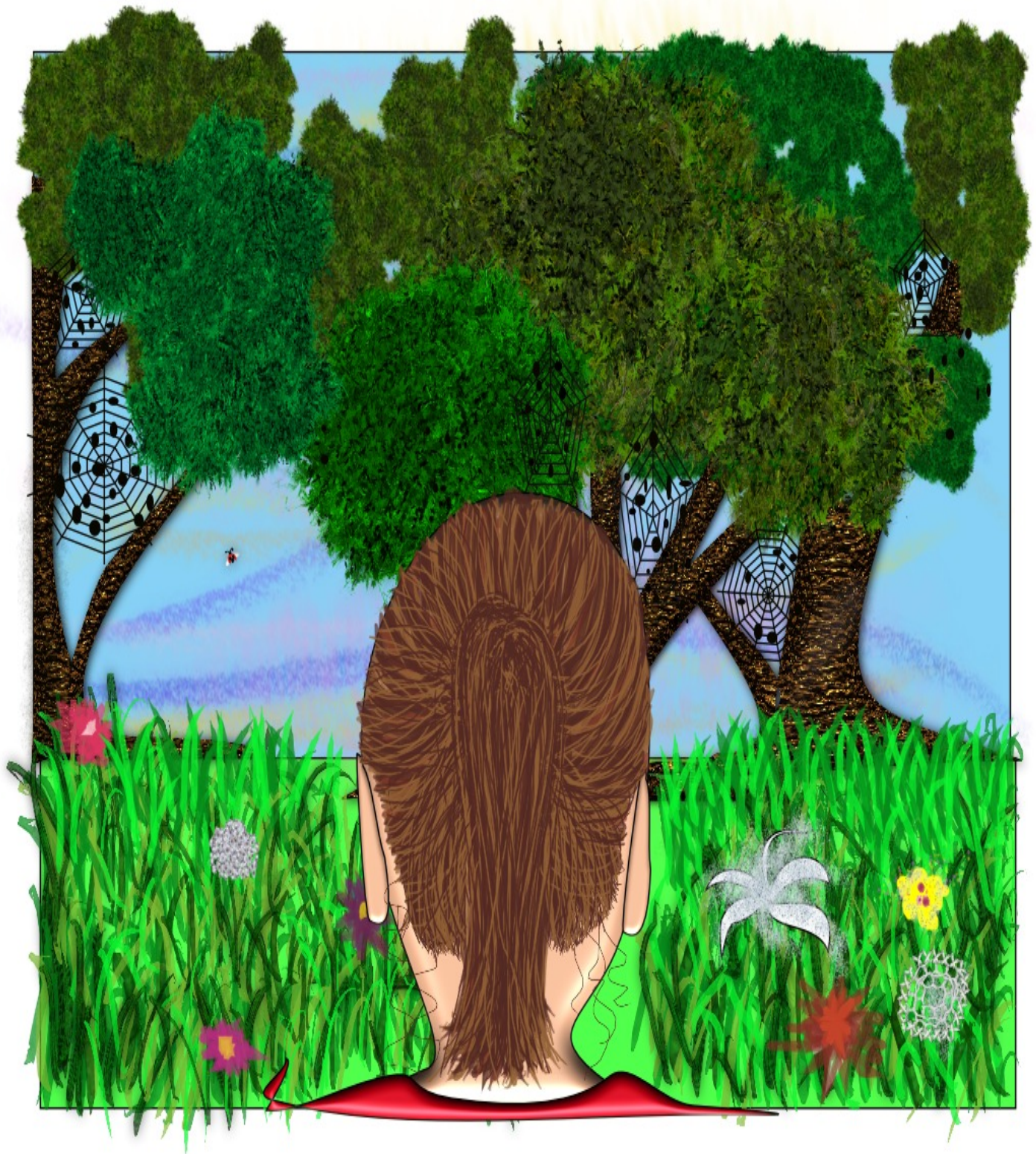
It seemed an eternity before the bug moved at all but then it moved each body part into the cozy warmth the sun had created. At last, the ladybug had reached the tip of the grass blade.

The sadness Emma had felt at the bug's failure was now replaced with great joy as she watched the bug extend one wing and then the other permitting them time to dry.

It gave it's wings a few practice beats then took off in an awkward ballet toward the source of light as if it knew the glory that awaited it.







This time Emma cheered aloud in relief and delight at the small insect's victory. Her heart whispered its thanksgiving to her Father. Her weary eyes followed the ladybug's clumsy flight until it could not be discerned from a speck of dust.

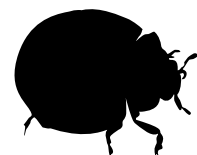
## Chapter Four

### Why?

Emma drew in a deep breath exhaling it slowly as sharp pains forced her to realize her mistake in remaining in one position too long. She gritted her teeth against the ache as she wondered what could be keeping her Father. Yet, she knew he always kept his promises so she put the thought from her mind choosing to concentrate on making her swollen limbs obey her. The thought of the ladybug's victory caused a broad smile to brighten her expression.

Not helping the bug had never occurred to Emma and she knew she would do it again if the need arose. However, she had to admit that she had become quite frustrated with the frequency and length of the aches and pains she experienced each day. Worse was the realization that the days of more pain were outnumbering the days of less pain. She knew her Father would be able to explain what was going on. She had so many questions to ask and had prayed fervently for understanding. She was so excited when her Father had asked her to meet him here.

With that thought a new kind of warmth made its way through her body erasing the pain as it went. Without looking, she knew her Father had arrived.





Emma raised her gaze to see the outstretched arms of her Father beckoning her into his embrace. Her pain free limbs now leapt into the strength of his waiting arms. She immediately felt his power, compassion and love flood her being.

Even so, Emma clung to her Father as if her very life depended upon that single embrace.

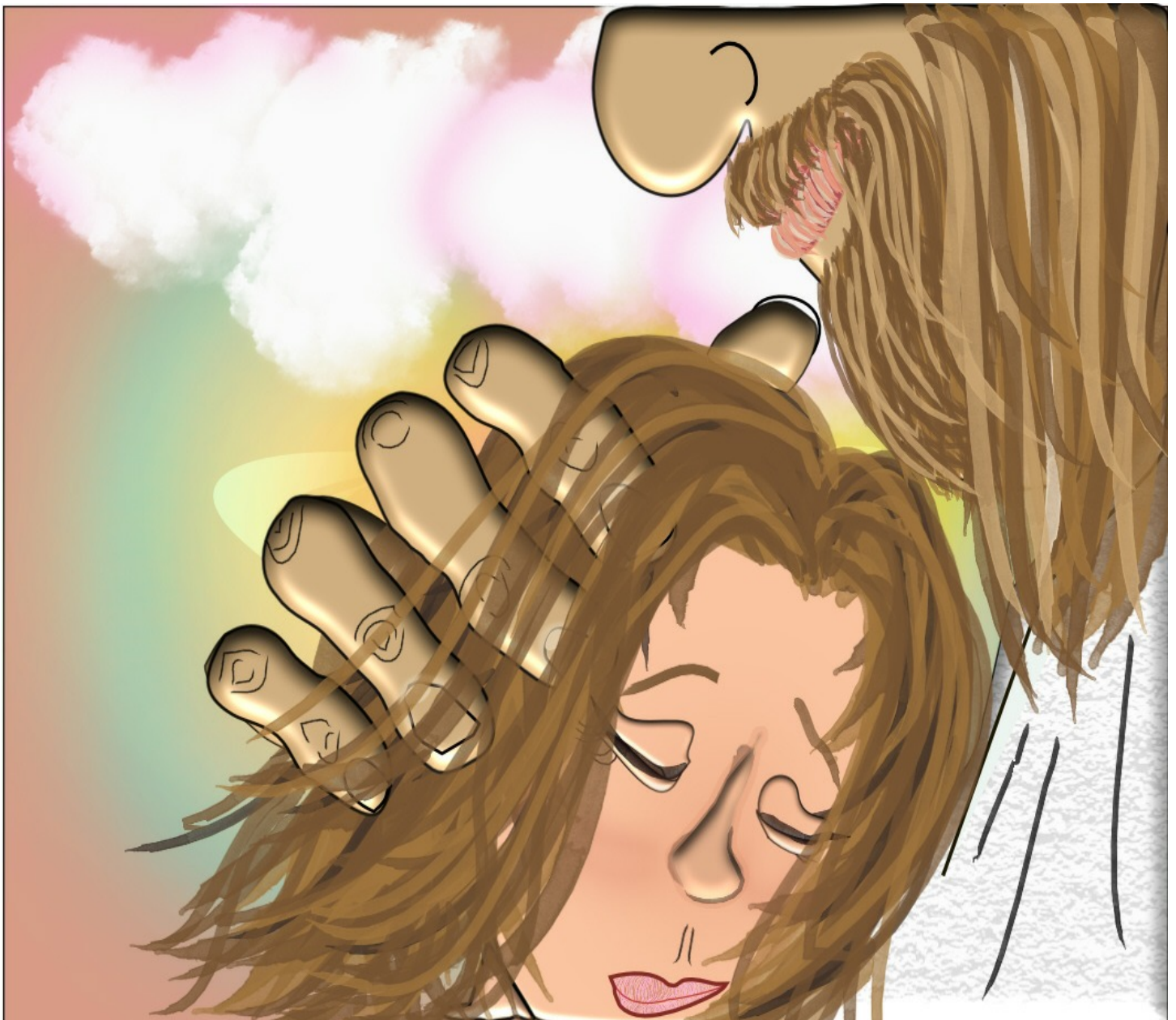
"Hello daughter", his soothing voice sent shivers throughout her being, causing her to cling to him that much tighter.

"Father, I have missed you so much", her words were barely a whisper but her father felt the pain in each one.

He knew the questions her heart ached to ask, "Emma, ask the questions that have burdened your spirit for so long."

Emma reluctantly loosened her embrace furrowing her brow deeply in contemplation. The frailty of her tone filled her Father's heart with compassion and love.

"Child, ask and I will answer." The power in his words was wrapped in love and mercy giving Emma the confidence to ask her questions.



With a voice all a tremble, she uttered her first, "Father, there is so much pain and suffering in your creation. Why do you make so many bad things happen all the time? I thought you loved your creation, I thought you loved us. I thought you loved me? Are you mad? Are you punishing us"?

Emma's voice trailed off in a whisper as the rush of questions expended her breath.

The Father's chest expanded as he drew in a deep breath then gently tilted Emma's head so that he could peer into her eyes.

"Daughter, I am not angry with you." The tenderness of his words caused the tears that had threatened before to now spillover.

He brushed her tears away and gently kissed her forehead. She relaxed and listened intently as he began to answer her questions.





"When I created this world I made it perfect. The waters were crystal blue and teeming with life. The land was fertile and quiet. There wasn't a single quarrel in my creation. It was beautiful, it was without blemish." The Father's expression while he spoke broke Emma's heart.

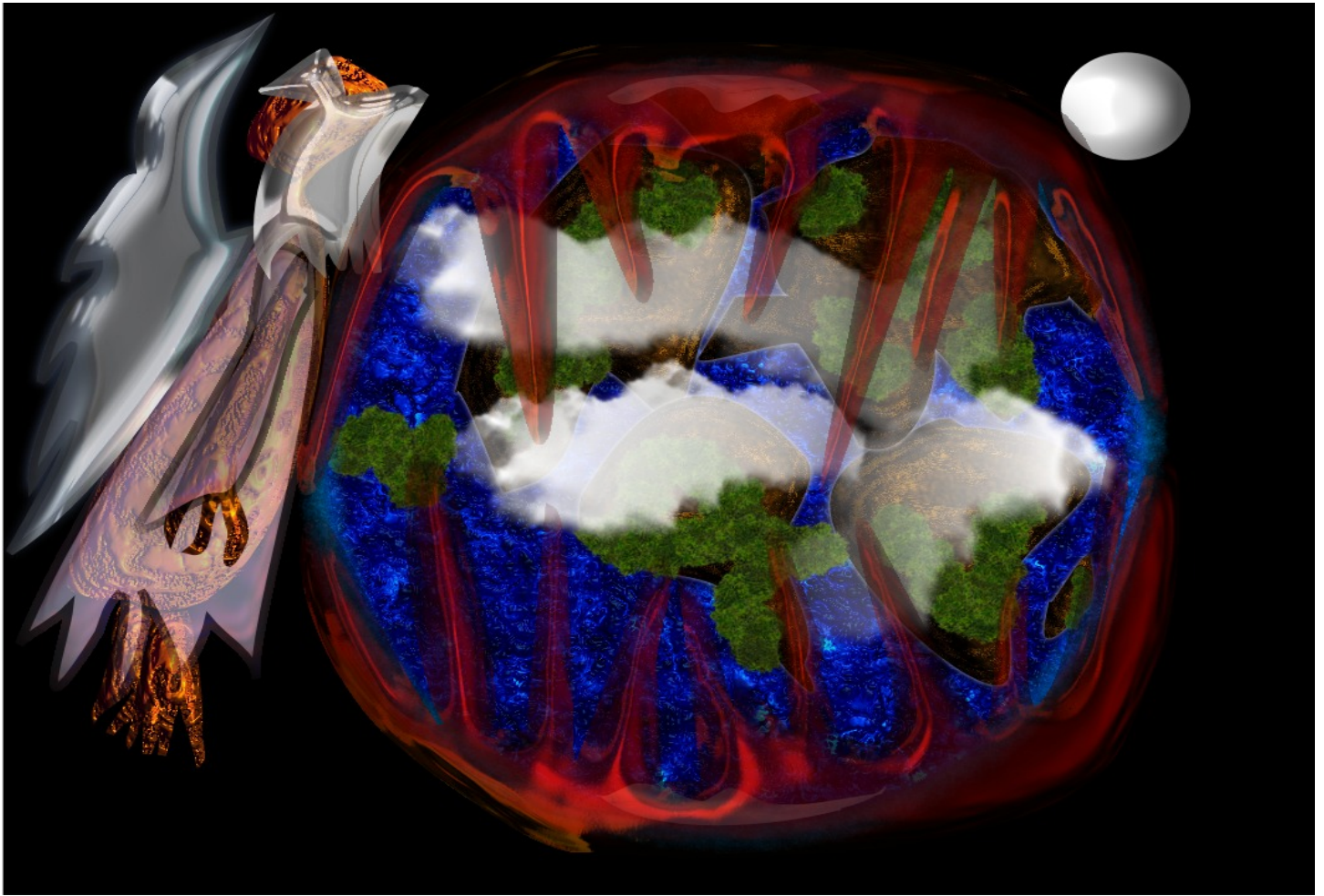
"What happened Father? Why did everything change", Emma pushed further?

"When I created my first children I gave them everything they needed including the ability to make their own choices. I did this because I loved them and wanted to be happy. I made them to love each other but I also gave them curiosity, intelligence, and a driven need to figure out how things worked", he explained.

Emma's intense gaze silently begged her Father to continue his discourse.

"You are wondering how things are so different now? It was not long before the gift of choice because the doorway through which sin entered the world."





"Choice is bad then?" Emma questioned.

"No child. Choice is not bad. When a person makes a choice based on selfish reasons then pain and brokenness enters and all of creation is hurt. The very cells that make everything up are broken allowing disease and death. The land, water, air, everything is broken allowing disasters and destruction. But when a person chooses to do something unselfish driven by love then kindness and love grows healing my creation."

"My children walk past one another but refuse to see. Each person has within them the power to change the world. Each and every person causes a change, by their choices, whether they realize it or not."



"I supply them with endless opportunities to glimpse paradise by loving one another selflessly. Each person has within them the power to heal the brokenness that has poisoned my creation. The key to spark healing depends on whether they listen when I speak and then act when I tell them too.

I do not shout orders about so that all may see and hear. No, my commands come in the whispers of the Holy Spirit and each of my children have the choice to obey or ignore me. I whisper so that you have to listen in earnest to hear me speak but you cannot hear me at all if you do not believe I exist.

My children, who refuse to see the suffering of others, cause just as much harm as those who choose to deliberately hurt others for their own pleasure or gain," he said with great sadness in his voice.

Emma hesitated, "Some people have told me that I have suffered because I have done something wrong and that you must be angry with me. Other say I am not praying in the right way. And still others tell me that I was created to suffer.," Emma's eyes plead with her father to tell her otherwise.

The Father sighed deeply, "The suffering in creation is not by my hand. Sin creates fractures throughout every part of my creation including the human heart. When the heart is broken then the person's thoughts and feelings are poisoned causing them to make poor choices, which causes the poison to spread further.

Satan is actively trying to destroy my children and all of creation but he knows the weakest point is the human heart. If he turns my children against me then creation declines. But he cannot see there is also strength in the human heart put there by me so that all can resist him", explained the Father.



He continued, " I sent my Son, who paid for all my children's sins, so that all of you could reach eternity with me by accepting my free gift of salvation. If I had not sent Jesus then all my children would have been lost to Satan forever. But each child must accept the free gift in order to see me.

All the plans I have for my children are to help them succeed and prosper but not by the world's standards. They must come to me with repentant hearts. They have to choose to love and obey me. He paused to look at Emma and watch her scowl in deep concentration upon the words he had given her then he continued.

Dearheart, the people who tell you that your illness and hardships are a punishment from me are just afraid," explained her Father.

"Afraid? Afraid of me"?, Emma asked in shock.

"Not exactly , my love. They fear the hardships you have faced and continue to face. They think that if you are doing something wrong, something sinful and I am punishing you for it then they will be okay as long as they do everything right. It is impossible for humanity to do everything right or sinless. I would never have sent Jesus if humans could achieve perfection on their own", he continued.



"Emma, if they blame you for your pain and suffering then they think they are safe. If they think I am punishing you then they feel righteous because they reason they are blessed because of their own 'goodness'.

They are wrong Emma, I love you as I love them. I did not send this illness upon you, it was caused by the consequences of a broken creation. Sin, every sin has far reaching consequences that cannot be erased by 'doing good'.

I do not want my children to suffer or be in any pain but the choice they or others make allows sin to create harm. Satan scourges the land and people when they invite him in," He offered.

"But, you can stop it all! You can stop all the pain, right? Why don't you stop your children from hurting each other? Why didn't you stop them from choosing to hurt me?" Emma's voice trailed off as she looked away allowing tears to cascade down her face.

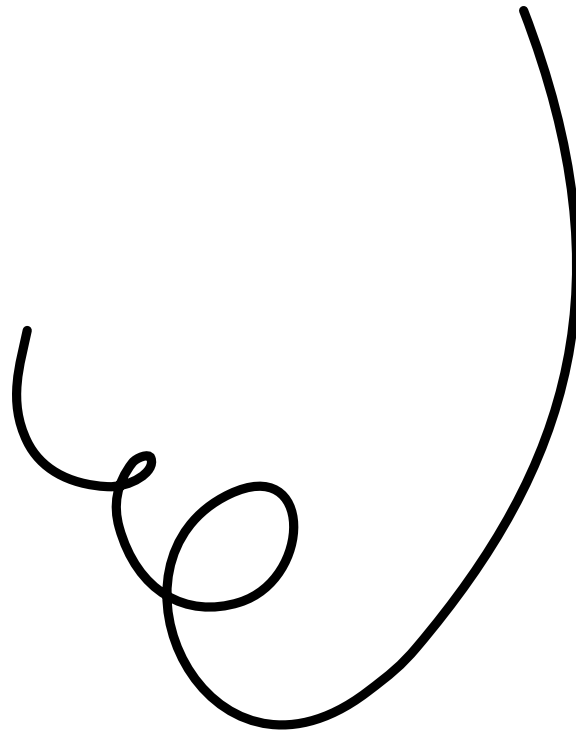
The Father embraced her firmly but gently allowing his own tears to mingle with his child's. He held her protectively until her sobs subsided.

"Why did you leave me Father, I needed you?" Emma buried her desperate plea into his tunic.



"Emma, I never left you", the Father's voice was heavy with emotion.

"My anger was kindled against the men who hurt you for their own pleasure and against those who caused harm through their ignorance. Those people made a choice and that choice caused you pain. My heart broke with yours, I wept as you wept, and I felt the pain you endured. I will never leave you even when all others turn away from your pain. I love you daughter", her Father offered.



## Chapter Five

### Parables

The father directed Emma's gaze into the center of the Nook. Her eyes followed his arm as he pointed to a small flower amongst many weeds,

"Do you see the small flower there", queried the Father.

Emma nodded indicating her eyes had spied the rosebud to which he was pointing. She thought the flower delicate and very beautiful. Even if it did appear to be lonely being the only one in that patch of the Nook.

"Do you see the weeds all around the flower, well they are trying to choke the life from it. Some of the weeds are quite pretty but they have one goal and that is to feed off the life of the rose, He explained. The rose is struggling to survive and it appears to be fighting alone against the things trying to destroy it," offered the Father.



Before the Father finished explaining Emma leapt from his lap announcing that she would rescue the small flower. She began furiously pulling the entwined weeds from the delicate flower. She grasped them and pulled with all her might but the weed roots ran deep. After several pulls, she felt the roots let go as she fell backwards with a fist full of weeds. Her satisfaction shone through the smile she beamed at her father. The Father answered her smile with one of his own.

"Emma, where is the rosebud?" He asked gently.

Her Father asked the question with a tone parents use when they already know the answer but wait while the child discovered it.

Emma scanned the area trying to locate the flower she had just rescued. It was gone but before she could ask what had happened she felt a small prick in her hand. Her joy turned to sorrow as her eyes discovered what her heart already knew.





"I thought I was helping it. I thought I was rescuing it," she explained.

The Father extended his arms inviting her to rejoin him. "Daughter, the rosebud had overcome great obstacles from seedling, to sprout, and finally to the bud resting in your grasp. It would have grown strong in spite of the weeds that were trying to destroy it. The flower would have eventually found my light giving strength; thus, adding healing to my creation. Your tender heart moved you to act. You wanted to stop its struggle but it was not strong enough to withstand the separation from the weeds that would have withered given enough time. Do you understand why I told you this story?"



"I think so. If you come back right now to stop all the bad and heal creation then those who are trying to reach the life you give but are not ready yet, or have not heard of you will be destroyed along with those who do evil" Emma ventured.

"Yes child. If I come now then many of my children will be lost but the longer I wait the more who will be saved." He affirmed.

Emma's face contorted in deep thought and concentration.

"What is it child? Do not fear, ask your question, " The Father encouraged knowing the struggle within Emma's heart.

"There are so many people hurting. Many have turned away from you because they blame you for their suffering. It seems like those who hurt others are rewarded with all of what life has to offer. Father, many say you do not hear our prayers", Emma looked away afraid to see disappointment or anger in her Father's face.



"Look at me Emma", he prodded gently.

Emma met his gaze finding instant relief as her Father's love washed over her.

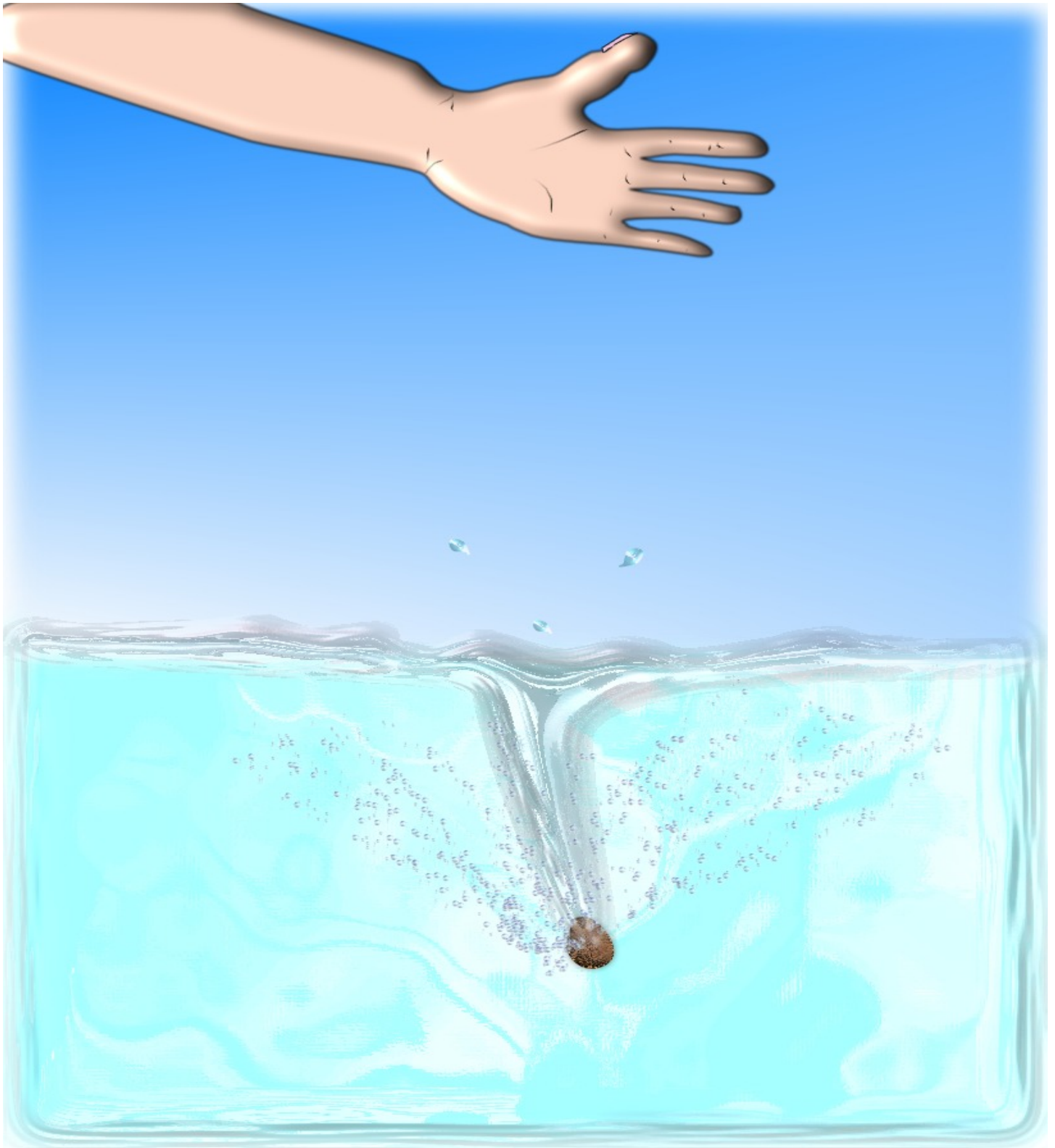
"It was never my will to see a single child be harmed by another or die from starvation, disease or cruelty. My children were never meant to die at all."



However, humanity chose sin and continues to do so, which damages creation. Some have hardened their hearts against me choosing what this world h=can offer them instead. What they do not understand is that their lives are just as long as a spark in a fire and then gone. This isn't the place I want my children to be for eternity. Each sin committed sets into motion a hundred other sins and each of those creates a chain reaction that is tearing my creation apart," he explained.

"Look here Emma," said the Father as he took her hand and led her to the stream. He quieted the water and then handed her a small stone.

"Take this bit of hardened earth and drop it into the water, then watch intently as to how the water reacts," he commanded.



Emma took the stone and dropped it into the water. As the pebble hit the surface her Father slowed time so that she could see every interaction between the water and the stone that can be recorded by the human eye. Wide-eyed, Emma watch the stone crash through the surface of the stream. In turn, the water shot up in a column where the stone had made entry. Finally ripple began forming from the center outward until they reached the banks of the stream.

"Do you understand, Daughter?" He asked.

"I believe I do. Sin enters creation just as the stone entered the water and then it begins to poison everything around it?" She offered.

"It is as you say Emma, you understand well. The ripples never stop moving. You may not be able to see the ripples move through the land or air but they do and as a result all of creation is touched without knowing where it came from or why it happened." He continued.

"Evil has one job and that is to destroy all that I have created and all that I love, especially my children. It lures my children away from causing them to choose more evil until it has persuaded them that I am no longer here. The hurricanes, famines, diseases, earthquakes and all other disasters are natural consequences of a fallen creation. As my children continue to invite evil into their lives then creation breaks even more. More will suffer." He explained.

"The consequence of sin affects every single molecule from the smallest particle to the grandest mountain, all is affected." He explained.

Knowing his child needed more he continued. "Let us consider your little ladybug for a moment. Look there at the edge of the Nook. What do you see?". He asked.

"Um...Oh! Spider webs, I see spider webs!" Emma's words tumbled atop one another as she triumphantly answered her Father's question. The Father's chuckle shook them both. Emma's cheeks burned crimson in embarrassment.

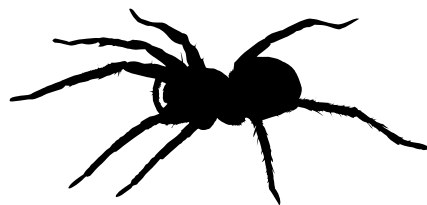
"Why do you suppose the spiders chose to build their webs way over there instead of inside the Nook where thousands of insects bed for the night?" He asked.

"Perhaps they want to be the first to see the sunrise?" Offered Emma.

"Not exactly, but the sun is the key. Look closely at the webs, what do you see in them?"

She squinted her eyes in an attempt to identify what the webs held. "I can see little black dots in them. Wow, there are so many dots that it is difficult to see the pattern of the web and some of the webs are ripped." Emma looked to her father for explanation.

"Last night the fastest, strongest, and most healthy insects settled in that part of the Nook because it held the juiciest green plants. Those plants get all the morning and afternoon sun. These plants here get little or no direct sun at all. The bugs who get the best that this Nook has to offer never consider all the other who do not. They think themselves clever indeed to have been so wise as to have chosen the best areas." Her Father explained.



"After all, they are privileged to the first rays of sunlight, feed upon the best plants and get everything good from this Nook. These insects become strong and healthy and soon they believe that their success is due to their own hard work and to the great choices they have made in life. Yet, because their position and status allowed them to receive the sun first, to take an easy path to the tip of each leaf and to have the best opportunity to dry their wings they are lured into believing in their own power."



He continued, "They never ask themselves who it was that had provided them with the sunbeams they only assume it is their right to have them. By the time the bug's wings had dried and they were ready to take off, that same sun for which they took credit blinded them to the dangers ahead. They became caught in the webs, which had been woven the night before."

Emma's eyes focused on the spot where she had first found the ladybug and her became heavy thinking of how long the little bug had struggled only to become a spider's dinner.

"Father, why didn't you help her? Didn't you hear her cries? Didn't she pray for help? Didn't you know how sad and weary she was? Why didn't you help her? Why Father, why?, Emma demanded in a desperate attempt to understand.

The Father gently brushed the hair from his daughter's eyes then interrupted a tear on its path down his child's cheek.

"Emma, I heard her every cry and felt her anguish. I knew how badly she was hurting and how afraid she was. I listened to her every prayer with love and compassion." His voice gently caressed her weary soul.

"Then why Father, why didn't you help her?" Frustration clear in her voice.

"I did answer her prayer for help. *I created you,*" he stated.

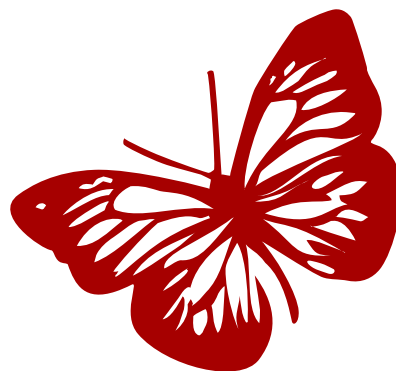


## Chapter Six

### Understanding

The meaning of the Father's words illuminated her spirit with understanding and awe. She did have a purpose! Her Father created her for a reason! Emma's breath caught in her through as she realized how her prayers had been answered over the years. Now she finally understood. Her Father sent all the people who had helped her survive. This meant that he heard her cries, he never left her! All those people, who had helped her hadn't been random people entering and exiting her life. Instead, they were direct answers to her prayers. The thought filled her with warmth and peace.

"It was the curious nature I wove into your being that urged you to investigate the movement but it was your empathy that mad you stay. You braved the cold wet grass knowing your legs would ache the moment you stepped upon it. You chose to help the tiny creature ignoring you own suffering. You r tender compassion felt the pain, frustration and burden the ladybug carried. You never gave pause to think of the cost to you." He beamed with pride as he spoke.





Everyone of her Father's words filled her Spirit anew. Cupping her face in his hands he said,

"I created you for moments such as these."



"My children who are broken by the sinful choices of others are not being punished by me. Instead, I help them use the tragedy in their lives to help heal my creation." Continuing, the Father explained.

"These, 'broken' children walk in my footsteps. Only those who are broken can see others through my loving eyes. Only those who have survived life's heartaches are able to reach out to another in pain and offer true comfort without condemnation. The evil that continues to infect my creation means to destroy all of my children but I take what was meant for destruction to build an army of people who hunger after my will and who are willing to be the answer to another's desperate prayers. These broken vessels are my special children. They are selfless, loving compassionate and possess a strength within that Samson could not even match," said He.

"Yes, beloved, I knit you together in your mothers womb not to suffer but to be light to others." The Father's eyes fill with tears as he

continued. "I never wanted harm to come to you. Others chose to hurt you in order to please themselves but that was not my will. The illness that began attacking your frail frame from such a tender age is not punishment from me, for you did no wrong. All of these things occurred because my creation has been infected with sin and it is trying to destroy anything good."

The tears flowed freely down

the Father's face as he spoke because of the pain and suffering Emma had endured and what she still must face. His heart broke for her.



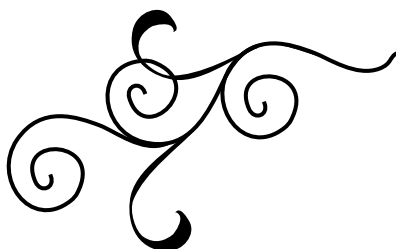
She gently brushed the tear from his cheek and smiled weakly offering, "Daddy, its okay. It doesn't hurt that much and now I understand that you did not send any of the evil that has touched my life or my family's life. I understand that you are waiting to return is not because you do not care but because you love us, all of us, too much. It's okay Daddy, I still love you with all my heart.

"Daughter, you have become everything I knew you could be and I am well pleased with you." Her Father's face shone with love as he beamed his pride toward Emma.

His loving words were like the salve to her brokenness. Everything made sense now. Everything she had endured had a purpose and just as she had prayed in earnest for help there were others praying right now for the Father's help. He had not sent the evil that hurt her: instead, he provided her with the strength to endure it. He sent people to help her survive the pitfalls that had threatened to swallow her. The Father had created her because he wanted her. His creation had needed her.

A thought entered her mind almost too wonderful to dare to think. Perhaps her job was finished, maybe He had asked her there today to bring her home? Her body was a tingle with the sheer joy of such a thought.

Excitedly she asked, "Father, is it time to go home now?" Emma was not speaking of her earthly home; instead, she was eager to know if her Father was taking her with him.



The Father paused for a moment that Emma thought would not end then he spoke, "I will allow you to make the choice. Will you come with me now or will you stay here a little while longer to continue being or bringing the answer to another's prayers?"

Emma was surprised, her the answer to another's prayers? She met her Father's gaze and for a pregnant moment she felt her soul fill with joy, love, fear, strength, and understanding. All at once, as her Father peered into her she knew all she was and all she could be through her Father's eyes.

"Father, I know I must stay here and allow you to use my life to help heal your creation even if it is only one person at a time." Emma answered.



"My Dearheart, there are many praying for my help and I am sending you and



others like you to help answer their prayers by leading them to me. Emma, never forget this one thing, I chose to create you because I loved you before you were every born. I breathed life into your body on that cool October day knowing you would have many challenges but equipping you with an abundance of courage and perseverance. I have gifted you with all the abilities you will need to help others see, if you choose to do so," offered the Father.

The fierce determination in Emma's countenance flooded the Father with love.

"Come, we have much work ahead of us. Many of my children are lost in the

darkness without knowing a light exists. I am send you to help them see me and to show them the way," Urged the Father.

They allowed one another one last loving embrace. The Father promised to return for her some day bringing his justice and renewal with him. Giving her hand a gentle squeeze, he released her then walked into the light. Each step they took away from one another brought Emma back to her present day and the reality in which she lived. She turned and walked toward the cave entrance allowing herself one last look. She breathed deeply inhaling every scent her mind could record. A broad smile brightened her expression as she remembered the words of her Father.

He had said he was well pleased with her. He said that he loved her. He had chosen to create her for times such as these. She wasn't a mistake and her suffering has been used for good even if the devil meant it to be her destruction. She turned back to the darkness girding herself with the strength of her Father's promises. As the darkness enveloped her frame she heard herself saying, "Do not give up, the Father is sending me and I finally know why!"



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Gen 3: The fall of mankind into sin

Isaiah 14: 12-14 Satan's Fall

Matthew, Mark, Luke & John: The Gospels of Jesus the Christ, Our Savior

John 3: 16 God so loved the World ...

Romans 10:13 Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 8:18-22 Current sufferings versus future glory and the longing of Creation to be healed

Romans 8: 28-31 in all things, God works for the good of those who love him...if God is for us,  
who can be against us?

Romans 12:12-13 Be Joyful in Hope

I Cor. 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it...

Phil. 1:29 suffering for Christ

Phil. 3:10 Power of the resurrection

Gal. 3:4 Reason for suffering

1 Peter 2:20-21 we follow in Christ's footsteps when we experience suffering

1 Peter 4:12-13 Do not be surprised by suffering

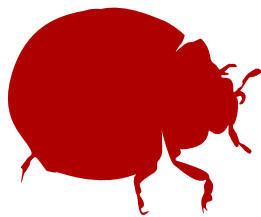
1 Peter 4:16 Do not be ashamed to suffer as a Christian

1 Peter 5:10 God will restore you

2 Peter 3:9 Why the Lord does not come back right this moment-Mercy

\*Please note: these are only a few key references upon which this book was built but I highly suggest reading the Holy Scriptures (Bible) in their entirety. Then pursue God with all your heart, mind and soul. It is a worthy pursuit in a world full of darkness and pain. My heart and prayers go out to all in pursuit of meaning to their suffering. The journey is long, difficulty and fraught with pitfalls but the destination cannot be matched. Journey well my friend.

The  
End







Tina M Blackledge

A perfectly imperfect child of God

A History High School Teacher

A Counselor to Broken Children & Families

A Protective Sister & Aunt

A Fierce Friend

An Avid Reader & Writer

Someone who has been on the path of suffering for a very long time, 43 years,  
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