

Remember Me

A NOVELLA ABOUT FINDING
OUR WAY TO THE CROSS

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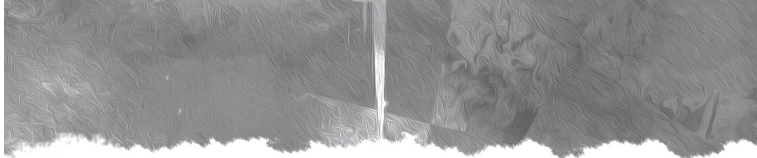


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I

The Word Became Flesh

CHRISTMAS EVE

She was safe. Not well, not at peace, but safe.

Katherine Rhodes lingered in the bedroom doorway and offered a silent prayer for Wren, who was writhing and whimpering in her sleep, no doubt tormented by her usual nightmares over all she had been unable to prevent. *If she had been more attentive. If she had been more assertive. If she had recognized the signs and demanded Casey get help.*

Kit quietly shut the door. Not all the way, though. The three-inch gap was a psychological prop—even if it didn't provide physical protection. She had been unable to provide such protection for her son, and she would be unable to provide it for her great-niece.

If she had been more attentive, if she had been more assertive, if she had recognized the signs and demanded Micah get help, then maybe he would be in the prime of midlife instead of forever seventeen.

The same voices harassing Wren had plagued Kit for many years, and though she had long ago become practiced in recognizing their source and rejecting them, noticing and naming the

voices didn't mean they went silent—just dormant, waiting to be awakened by some other crisis when she felt out of control and yet responsible.

She dialed Jamie's number as she descended the stairs. "She's okay. Just sleeping."

"I'm sorry to keep pestering you for updates," Jamie said, "but when I couldn't get her to answer her phone . . ."

"No, I know. I promise, I'll call you if I notice anything new." She had made that same promise to Jamie many times over the past couple of months, ever since offering her home as a place for Wren to regroup and recover after her stay at Glenwood Psychiatric Hospital. But a mother didn't outgrow anxiety, especially for an already fragile daughter now catapulted into the additional trauma of losing her closest friend not quite two weeks ago.

"I don't suppose she'll make it to church tonight." There was something wistful in Jamie's voice, as if a Christmas miracle were still a possibility.

"No, I don't think so. But her pastor is coming to see her between the services."

"Oh! That's good. I'm glad to hear that. Please thank her for me."

"I will." While Wren had accepted Hannah's invitation to bring her communion on Christmas Eve, she might not remember the conversation. Kit didn't want Wren to miss the opportunity to receive it, though. Receiving communion from elders who took turns visiting the house was one of the few things Kit vividly remembered from the days after Micah died. Robert didn't want to participate. She hadn't blamed him. Not for that, anyway. But when

she'd felt so disconnected from her life, so disembodied with grief, chewing the bread and swallowing the juice was a tactile way to practice faith when she felt as if she didn't have any faith to practice.

Jamie said, "And what about tomorrow? Are you heading to Sarah's?"

"We'll play that by ear, see how Wren's feeling." Kit had already prepared her daughter for the possibility of not joining the family for their celebration. *The girls will be so disappointed*, Sarah had said, with a tone that communicated her own. But it couldn't be helped. Leaving Wren alone for an extended period simply wasn't safe.

"I can never thank you enough for all you've done, Kit, for all you're doing. I know I keep saying that, but I don't know what else to say."

"I'm glad to be able to do it." Kit paused on the bottom stair landing and peered through the beveled glass on the front door. The cul-de-sac was quiet. "I hope you and Dylan and the kids can have a wonderful celebration together, even with all this."

"I'm trying," Jamie said.

"I know you are. You're doing so well."

"Some days are better than others." Jamie sighed. "I've got to get costumes ready for the nativity play. Joseph has the stomach flu, and none of the other boys is willing to play the role. So Phoebe has agreed to give up being a sheep and step in. Olivia is painting on a mascara beard and mustache as we speak."

Kit laughed. "Take pictures. Lots of them. And I'll ask Wren to call you later if she's up to it."

As she waited for Hannah to arrive, Kit debated whether she should try to wrap the two Vincent van Gogh prints she'd purchased for Wren: *Starry Night* and *Olive Trees*. Opening wrapping paper might require too much effort. Or stir painful memories of other Christmas celebrations. Maybe it was best simply to give her the prints without making note of them being Christmas gifts.

She sat on the sofa, the prints side by side on her lap, and thought about the many conversations she and Wren had shared about Vincent's life and faith, about how some of his work evoked images of Jesus wrestling in Gethsemane and how they hoped to partner together in creating content and art for the Journey to the Cross at New Hope.

But that was before Casey died. Given Wren's current state of mind, it was unlikely she would be able to meditate on the Scriptures, let alone paint a prayerful response to them in time for Holy Week. And as far as weaving her own story into the New Hope reflections—as Kit had told Wren she would consider doing—the more she thought about it, the more she realized that wasn't the right context. People who came to New Hope for the Journey to the Cross came to pray with the Word and the art, not to read someone's personal narrative.

Still, Wren had bravely asked her to share her story. And though no words of wisdom or consolation, no words about the loss of her son or her own journey with depression could mitigate Wren's suffering in these early days of her anguish, perhaps there was another way to offer Wren what she'd asked for.

If she told her story in small doses, wrapping bits of personal narrative around the Journey to the Cross Scripture texts, then Wren could read it when she was well enough to process it. And return to it whenever she needed to be reminded that she was not alone. “Companions in misfortune,” Wren often said, quoting Vincent. As much as she loved reading his letters to his brother, maybe she would appreciate reading letters written to her.

Kit glanced over her shoulder at headlights in the driveway and set the prints aside. Considering the ways Wren’s journey had already tapped her own subterranean sorrow, she suspected that by saying yes to writing letters, she might be saying yes to much more.

With the cross casting its shadow on the manger, tonight was as good a time as any to begin.

CHRISTMAS EVE

My dear Wren,

Tonight I watched your pastor offer you a bit of bread and hold the cup to your lips so you could drink. “Do this and remember me,” she said. You chewed and swallowed, then sank back into your bed to sleep.

I know you can’t remember much right now. Grief has carved too deep a chasm. So we trust the even deeper mysteries and receive by faith what we cannot receive through reason or effort. We receive Christ’s death and life in our places of death and wait. And when we cannot wait with hope, we let others practice hope for us.

A few weeks ago you asked if I ever share my story at the retreats I lead at New Hope. I told you that I haven’t because I’ve never wanted

the content to point to me. If our suffering has been severe, our testimonies can become a distraction or even a stumbling block to those who might be reluctant to grieve their own losses, especially if they're tempted to talk themselves out of their pain by measuring it against or comparing it with someone else's. There are no star sufferers, however, in the kingdom of God. So, as I share from my own story, I pray my words won't shine a spotlight on me but reveal instead how Jesus has met me in the losses and enlarged me through them. That's my hope for you, too, that the excruciating pain you have endured and that you're enduring right now will become a pathway toward deeper communion with the One who is with you in it.

Even as I begin, I'm mindful that we are unreliable narrators of our own stories. But who else can tell them from the inside? Some of my memories are only recollections of what others told me I said I was thinking or feeling when I was in the depths of despair. I'll try to offer you the same gift, to hold the things you cannot hold right now but might want to remember later. And if I record details you wish you could forget, please forgive me.

Tonight I'll light my Christ candle and, for both of us, I'll rehearse the truth that is a comfort to me in times like these, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, even if only in a mirror darkly. Jesus, in offering his bruised and wounded flesh—in giving his body broken for us—makes us whole, even when it doesn't seem like wholeness. This, we receive by faith. Tonight, for both of us, I'll also rehearse the truth that is hard to receive and trust in times like these, that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never overcome it.

I'm keeping watch with you, dear one.

Love,

Kit

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