

Thoughts of Fiction

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE
A Fable

This is a story that takes place in Jacksonville, Florida, one summer day.

One day, Mr. June Bug was out for a little sightseeing when he saw his friend Mr. Dirt-Dable building a new home for himself.

“What are you doing?” said Mr. June Bug to Mr. Dirt-Dable.

“I’m building a better home,” answered Mr. Dirt-Dable, and he flew away to get more dirt.

Mr. June Bug was watching Mr. Dirt-Dable work as he was building his new home.

Mr. June Bug said, “My very good friend, you are building your home wrong.”

Mr. Dirt-Dable looked at his friend and flew away singing, “I know, I know, I know.”

As Mr. Dirt-Dable returned with more and more dirt, Mr. June Bug said “My friend, listen to me.”

But Mr. Dirt-Dable went on singing his song, “I know, I know, I know.”

At the end of the day Mr. Dirt-Dable was finished building his home and tried to enter, for he was tired after working so long. Mr. June Bug was looking on to see what would happen. Mr. Dirt-Dable went to the front of his home, then to the back of his home.

Mr. June Bug said, “Do you have a door, my good friend?”

Mr. Dirt Dable said, “No, I don’t have a door to the front or the back. I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you, my dear old friend.”

The lesson of this story is it is better to stop and listen sometimes. You see – two heads are better than one.

Mittie Walker

ABOUT DOG

Can you guess who I am? I am a mammal, but I am not a human being. I am a female Beagle, which is a kind of dog. I was born in 2001 in Ohio. I am 4 years old now, but I would be a teenager if I were human. My family adopted me last July because I lost my owner at that time and was looking for my new family. My former family was American and, of course, they spoke English. My new family is Japanese, and at first, I didn't understand Japanese when they spoke to me. However, dogs can feel and guess their owner's mind, and so, I didn't care whether they spoke English or not. I love my family and they take good care of me, but they sometimes scold me when I chew on something. In addition, when I don't obey their order "Come," they seem to be upset. I can't hear anything while I am sniffing something because I love to sniff more than anything. I know that I have to obey my owner. My family has been looking for a solution to my behavior.

I have two human sisters and one human brother. My elder sister, who is a sixth-grader, often borrows a book about dogs from the school library. She reads it and studies about dogs like me. My mom also reads a Japanese language book about dog training. Reading Japanese is easier than reading English for her. They frequently talk about dogs. I sometimes listen to their conversation while I am lying on the floor. I guess that they want me to obey their orders. I said it before, didn't I? I can obey their orders sometimes, but I can't sometimes. When they say "Sit," I always sit. Then they praise me and say, "Good girl." When they say "Stay," I can stay most of the time. When they say "House," I go into my cage. However, I can't do one thing. That is "Come." If they say "come" inside the house, I can almost always go to them. I think that they are satisfied with it. If they say "Come" outside, I occasionally go to them. I guess that they

hope for me to come every time, but I don't. Why can't I come to them anytime? I have been thinking about it.

One day, I was in the backyard alone and I sniffed everywhere. I am crazy about sniffing. I found the scent of small animals, such as squirrels, rabbits, and chipmunks. Suddenly, the door was opened and Mom called me, "Come!" I looked back at her, but I ignored her and continued sniffing. She looked disappointed. Regrettably, smelling was more tempting than her.

Spring was coming. It was in March, but it was still chilly outside. My sister and Mom started to train me outside. Of course, they started with "Come." They stood at each end of the backyard and they prepared some treats, which they gave to me when I would obey their order "Come." When my sister called me, "Come," I wondered a little at first, then I remembered what I should do. Next, Mom called me, and I went to her. They gave me a treat each time, so I did it. I knew that they hooked me like a fish, but I did it anyway. When I obeyed their order, they smiled at me. It made me happy. I wanted to get the smiles and treats, so I decided to follow them.

In April, I got a new friend who was a stray kitten. Actually, my sister didn't want me to play with that kitten. She complained, "If he has fleas or some kind of sickness, you will get sick! Don't play with him!" She drove him off, but he sometimes visited me. One day, when I played with that kitten, Mom called me from the kitchen door. I turned around and went to her immediately. I did it! It seemed automatic. She was surprised because she thought that I wouldn't come when I played with my friend. Mom gave me a big smile and repeated "Good girl." After this event, Mom has still continued to train me, sometimes with treats and sometimes without them.

One beautiful morning in April, I played with my friend named Jordan. He is a one-year-old Rat Terrier. He and his sister, who is a human being, visited our house. Jordan and I enjoyed chasing each other, playing tug-of-war, and wrestling in my backyard. When we went inside the house for a drink of water, the garage door was opened suddenly. I thought that I could go outside without a leash, but my sister gave me an order, "Stay," so I stayed there and waited. When Jordan started to move and went outside, I was tempted to move with him, and I was not able to stop and I ran and ran. I heard my sister's voice, but I ignored it. Jordan's sister also called him. He stopped running and returned to his sister, but I didn't. I ran across the street and went into the woods. I sniffed everywhere and felt happy. However, I soon remembered my family. Meanwhile, Dad came and found me. He gently called me. I automatically went to him and he smiled at me and leashed me. I went back home with him. Dad told my family that I obeyed his order in the woods. My sister and Mom were surprised, but they smiled at me and praised me again and again.

Now, my family has been training me constantly. I have realized that they love me so much and I can depend on them. I think my behavior has improved. I believe that any dog can learn. The important things are the owner's love and the appropriate method.

Keiko Nakasuji

IZZABELLA AND THE BEHOLDERS

Izzabella, the tall, wide-eyed child with long brown curly hair, sat in her room doing her homework like she does everyday at 4:00 during the school year. She put down her pen and let her mind drift back to school. "Why don't I get along with kids my own age?" she thought as she sat back in her chair. Izzabella was never the popular child but yearned for that kind of attention from her classmates, teachers, and even her own parents who let her be lost somewhere in the midst of five children. She thought about Nikki, the skinny freckled faced girl with long flowing blond hair and pale blue eyes who always got all the attention from the other kids at school. "How can I be more like Nikki?" she thought to herself as she was chewing on her pen cap. Finding a way to be popular was her goal.

The next day, she went through her clothes, looking for something that would separate her from the other children. She found a blue jean skirt with plaid ruffles and a white short sleeved blouse with plaid trim around the neckline and around the short sleeves. She slipped on her white stockings and black dress shoes, hoping she would discover a new Izzabella. As she looked in the mirror, all she could see was the same girl who didn't fit in with the other more popular children.

Izzabella went to school on the bus like normal, sitting by herself. When she got to her class, she sat at her table wondering how to make an impression on the rest of her classmates. She watched Nikki talking loud, playing with her hair, and showing off her new Nike Air Max to other children. Izzabella knew her parents would never spend that kind of money on her; with five kids there was just no extra money for nice things like expensive shoes. She pulled her attention away from the shoes and noticed her behavior

some more. Nikki was always so loud and bubbly; she was never afraid to speak her mind to anyone. Maybe changing her shy, low-key personality was the issue at hand.

During her English class, Mrs. Smith was going over sentence structure when Izzabella thought she could try out her new theory. Nikki got a lot of her attention from getting on the teacher's nerves. Izzabella went into her school bag and got out a piece of gum she was saving for after school. She quickly chewed it up and then blew the biggest bubble she could. "Izzabella," the teacher screamed, "spit that gum this very second!" Izzabella got up, spit out her gum, and went back to her seat. Then the boy behind her asked for a piece of gum. "I don't have none!" Izzabella said in a high whisper. "Yes, you do and give me a piece," the boy demanded. "Would you leave me alone? I don't have any more gum for you!" The teacher looked over with wondering eyes, "Izzabella, I don't know what has come over you this morning! You are disturbing my class. Now stand outside."

Izzabella was outside, sitting on the hard ceramic floor, wondering if Mrs. Smith was going to call her parents. "I want to be popular, but I can't get in trouble. My mother will kill me." At that moment tears rolled down her cheeks as she let out small cries to herself. The classroom door swung open, and the little girl looked up at Mrs. Smith and her short red hair that came around her face softly. "Izzabella, what is wrong with you today? You are always so quiet".

"Nothing!" Izzabella cried as the tears came down harder.

"Something is wrong or those tears wouldn't be falling from your eyes. You know, Izzabella, I can keep a secret, and I bet you will feel a weight come off your chest if

you tell me.” She squatted her short legs down to see Izzabella’s eyes more clearly.

“None of the kids like me! I don’t have Air Max or money to buy those things. My hair is curly and dark. My eyes make me look half cat! Everyone thinks I’m a freak because cool people won’t hang out with me! I just want to be like Nikki.” Isabelle’s cries started to get louder. The teacher pulled her close to her, wrapping her arms around her.

“Now Dear, do you know how boring the world would be if everyone was like Nikki? There would be no variety, everyone would look and act just like her! That just wouldn’t be right. You, on the other hand, are beautiful and if you just hang in there, in a couple more years, you will have your turn,” the teacher said calmly stroking Izzabella’s long, thick curly hair. “Just be you, Izzabella. Not everyone will like you, but you just show those people who you are and I bet they will change their minds. If not, well, they don’t deserve to know this special, beautiful girl who just might someday come back to her high school reunion and see the popular kids in a whole new light.” Izzabella stopped crying.

“Do you think so, Mrs. Smith? I just want to feel like I belong,” Izzabella said quietly.

“Baby, you do belong and you just remember that! Now, are you ready to go back to class and be the Izzabella I know?”

“Yes ma’am,” Izzabella got up and went about her day as Izzabella and no one else.

Izzabella grew up with Mrs. Smith’s words close to her heart. She went to her high school reunion wearing a short black cocktail dress with thin stripes that fell beautifully

over her womanly curves. As she wandered into the high school in her stiletto shoes, she saw Nikki for the first time in ten years. Nikki's hair was cut in a boyish style, she was extremely obese, and her high-heeled boots weren't even zipped all the way up because of the fat around her legs. She was standing in the corner being ignored by the men who were once the boys that flirted around her on a daily basis. "Izzabella, time has been good to you." She turned around and saw the boy who bothered her for that piece of gum so long ago."

She stood smiling over what Mrs. Smith said to her in that hallway. She knew it was her time to shine.

"Would you like to dance?" the man asked.

"Yes, I'd love to!" Izzabella said with a beautiful smile that could have lasted a lifetime.

Rebecca Sablosky

THE MEDIEVAL NECKLACE

A little girl playing in a meadow in India found an old medieval beaded necklace. She saw something colorful yet dull with age. Thinking it just a stone, she bent down to pick it up and to her surprise, a complete strand of beads came out of the ground.

Some of the beads were small and some were large. Some were shiny and some were dull. It was a necklace of many colors. All the stones were smooth to touch. It looked like it hadn't been worn for hundreds of years.

The little girl took the beads to her very wise great grandmother. The old woman told the little girl that a woman had once been kidnapped wearing those very same beads. While she was struggling, the necklace had fallen to the ground, and she had hoped it would give a clue to her husband so he would find her. She knew it would have to work as he had made the necklace for her and it was the only one of its kind.

As he was out searching for her, he found the necklace and looked around where he was standing. He saw a barn, then he heard a woman yelling for help. He dropped the necklace and ran toward her. He found his wife tied up in the barn. He lifted her up and took her home, never thinking to pick up the necklace.

The great grandmother smiled and shed a tear. She thanked the little girl and was very grateful the little girl had found her mother's necklace.

Lisa Ewert

IT DOESN'T MATTER

Dedicated to all in this country who truly believe it doesn't matter if you're black or white.

My name is X-211-one million. I'm two hundred eleven out of a million clones. My crew, which is made up of clones also, and I were on our way back to our home galaxy when we came across a very primeval electromagnetic wave.

"Shall we investigate?" asked one of five hundred, my first officer. "I've been into this sector of space before. There are no intelligent life forms here. That was over a million years ago, two hundred eleven of a million."

"Yes, you're right. Plot a flight plan." So we headed for the third planet from a very small, yellow star. It was a beautiful world with blue skies and vast oceans.

"We better make the ship invisible. There is no way of knowing how these beings will react with a star ship in orbit above their world."

He was right of course. Our ship was Brobdingnagian, over five hundred miles long, and twice as high. "Let's have a look at them," I said. Two of five hundred turned on the view screen.

"Stone and glass architectural structures," remarked six of five hundred.

"What kind of beings are we dealing with here? Magnify." So, we got our first look at the beings on this out-of-the-way planet.

“What strange creatures,” observed one of five hundred. He was right. These creatures had four limbs that were attached to a large torso. On top of this torso was a round. . . I didn’t know what it was. It had five openings and two wet-looking, round objects—I could only guess what they were used for.

“What are they?” asked two of five hundred.

“The intelligent life forms of this world.”

“Impossible! How can such things have lordship over intelligence?”

“Nevertheless, they do.”

“I’m not going down on that world. I would get nauseated just being next to one.” Eight of five hundred wasn’t the only one who didn’t want to visit this world. It seemed no one on our entire ship wanted to sojourn to this new world.

“You better take on the shape of one of them,” he said. This wasn’t too difficult due to the fact we could take on any shape just by thinking about it.

“I’m going to be sick,” remarked ten of five hundred.

“I don’t know. Once you get used to the shape, it’s not so bad.”

“Why did you take on the shape of a pale one?”

“What does it matter? You want me to take on the color of a darker one?” I answered.

“It would be nice,” commented ten of five hundred. So, I became a darker one.

“Are you going to take over their world?”

“I’m not sure. Besides, I haven’t taken over a world in ten million years.”

“If there’s any trouble from them, I’m destroying the entire star system,” five of a hundred said.

“I’m sure I can handle a planet of primitive beings such as these. I am the captain of this ship,” I replied with a little anger.

“That you are, sir!” The next second, I willed myself on the surface of the planet. I was in a place called Mississippi, and I was lost. I had no idea how these beings lived or what their language was. I had to touch one of them, so I could understand. I had to draw off knowledge directly from one of their minds, if they had minds. I went into a small building.

“Hey, boy, have you lost your mind? This here place is for white men only. The colored people eat in the back, next to the hogs.” I had no idea what he was talking about. “Are you from out of town?” I just stood there.

“Maybe I can help you out, Billy Bob. You got that rope in the back of your truck?” The others in the room began to laugh.

“Let him be. Can’t you see he’s light in the head?”

“That’s the only thing about him that is light—the rest of him is dark!” More laughter. I grabbed hold of this creature that was standing next to me.

“Did you see that?” one of the beings yelled out.
“He touched a white woman!”

With that one touch, I understood the language and the limited knowledge that this life form had. “I’m sorry. I’m new here. I don’t want any trouble.”

“Boy, you just found a whole lot of it!”

“I only want something to eat.”

“It’s in the back. I’ll show you,” said this being whose name was Ruth Ann.

“You better tell him he’s in Mississippi now, Ruth Ann. Not up north somewhere. Down here our coloreds know their place.”

“I’ll tell him. Just leave him be.” So this being named Ruth Ann takes me out back. “Are you plumb crazy going in there like that? Where are you from?”

“Far away,” I said.

“It must be far away for you to do a fool thing like that.”

I began looking around. “This is a pulchritudinous planet.”

“A what? Don’t go using those big city words on me!”

“Oh, I’m sorry. This is a beautiful world.”

Ruth Ann looked up at the sky and smiled. "That it is," she said.

"Tell me," I asked, "What are all these signs? 'White only.' 'Colored only.' What do they mean?"

"Boy, you really are from far away."

"Really, Ruth Ann, what do they mean?"

"They mean colored people like you and white people like me live in separate communities."

"Why?"

"They ensure white people social, legal, and political domination over the coloreds like you."

"Is there a difference between you and me?"

"Are you making fun of me?"

"No, I'm not."

"The difference is our skin color."

I held out my arm and examined it. "Are you telling me just because my skin is dark that we're two distinct beings? Astonishing!"

"Who are you really? What's your name?"

"My name is Michael."

"I don't understand you, Michael. One minute you're talking like a college professor. The next minute you talk all idiotic."

“I’m sorry. It’s just that I don’t comprehend a lot of things on this world.”

“Stop right there!” yelled Ruth Ann. “What do you mean ‘on this world?’”

“I’m not from this planet.”

“What are you then? A spaceman? If you’re a spaceman, where is your spaceship?”

I pointed to the sky. “Right above us.”

Ruth Ann looked up into the sky. “Where? I don’t see anything.”

“That’s because it’s invisible right now.”

“Look, Michael, it’s been fun talking to you, but I have things to do.” Ruth Ann started to walk away.

“Wait. I’ll prove it to you.”

“How? By making your invisible ship visible?”

“I’ll show you where I live.”

“By taking me up to your invisible spaceship? You are one crazy colored man.”

I formed a three-dimensional image of my home star system above the palm of my hand, with its many bright, radiant stars. All the while, this small image of my galaxy was spinning on its axis. “It’s, it’s. . . magnificent. . . beautiful,” uttered Ruth Ann with tears in her eyes. “Show me more.”

“Not here. Can we go somewhere to be alone?”

“Yes, in the woods right down the street.” She grabbed my hand, not caring who saw her holding a colored man’s hand, and we ran into the woods behind the small town.

“Slow down,” I said. “You’ll make yourself sick.”

“I don’t care,” responded Ruth Ann, gasping for air. “Show me more.”

“OK, but I’ll have to talk loudly because of all this music.

“What music? I don’t hear anything.”

“You can’t hear the music? Why, it’s all around us!”

Ruth Ann looked around. “I don’t see anyone playing any music.”

“It’s not a person. It’s the trees, the wind, and the sunlight.”

“They’re singing? Making music?” Ruth Ann began laughing. “What does it sound like?”

“In your language, like a symphony orchestra, a harmony of sounds.”

“I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it! You really aren’t from this world!”

Just then, two small birds landed on my head. They began chirping away. I make two small crumbs of bread in my

hand. The birds took them, chirping very loudly, and then flew away. “What did they say?”

“They said thanks for the bread, and you’re kind of cute for a human.”

“Holy cow! Holy cow! You can understand bird talk!”

“Try to calm down, Ruth Ann. You’re overreacting.”

“Overreacting? You hear nature sing and talk to birds. Oh yeah, you also make bread crumbs out of thin air. How should I act, Michael?”

“I just don’t want you to have a sensory overload. Here, let’s sit down.”

“Michael, I know you look like a colored man now, but I can’t believe you really look human.”

“Does it matter?”

“No, not really. I’ve always believed you shouldn’t dwell too much on outside appearances or skin color, but on what a person is like on the inside, the heart. That’s what really matters.”

“Maybe. But others of your kind don’t think that way.”

“My kind? Oh, you mean white people, or should I say white humans? I’m sorry if you think all white people are evil.”

“What’s evil?”

“Michael, can I have a kiss? I’ve never kissed a man from beyond the stars.”

“What’s a kiss?”

“I’ll show you.” I had been all over the universe, seen things no human will ever hope to see, but this thing that Ruth Ann gave me. . this kiss. . I had never found anything in all my travels to compare to it.

“Well, well, well, if I didn’t see it, I wouldn’t have believed it. A white woman kissing a coon. Grab them, boys!”

“Jeb, no!” beseeched Ruth Ann. “You don’t understand! He’s not like us!”

“You’re darn right! He’s not like us. He’s a darkie.” The others laughed. “What I don’t understand, Ruth Ann, is why you let him kiss you, or should I say, why you kissed him.”

“She’s a coon lover,” said one of Jeb’s friends.

“I reckon so. I guess us poor white men just can’t gratify her.”

“Jeb, please. Let him go! If you want to hurt someone, hurt me.”

“Don’t worry about that, young lady. You’ll be hurt.” Jeb slapped Ruth Ann in the face. Blood dripped from the corner of her mouth. “Billy Bob, run back to the truck and git a rope. No, make that two ropes! And you,” Jeb walked over to Michael, “been in town for such a short time, and already you try to rape a white woman.”

“We were only talking.”

“You got a funny way of talking, boy.” At that point my body erupted with a very unusual sensation. I didn’t like the feeling at all.

“Stop it, Jeb! You’re hurting him!”

“You ain’t seen nothing yet, Ruth Ann. Has she, boys?”

“No, Jeb, she ain’t!”

The next thing I knew, eight humans were beating me. I fell to the ground in a ball, trying to protect myself, but this only made matters worse. I heard Ruth Ann in the background, very faintly, crying and yelling. “Alright, boys, pick him up. Playtime’s over.” I was forcefully picked up.

“Billy Bob, what the hell is taking you so long with them there ropes?”

Billy Bob returned with the ropes. Only it was not really him, but five of a hundred in control of his human body. “How long are you going to let this nonsense go on, Captain? Shall I order the solar system annihilated?”

“No,” I said, “return to the ship. That’s a direct order.”

“Idiot.!”

“Billy Bob, what the hell are you talking about?”

“I don’t know, Jeb.” Replied Billy Bob. “My mind kind of wandered.”

“I’ll say it did, but it don’t matter.”

“Why are you doing this?” I asked with blood dripping from the many cuts on my body.

“Why?” said a shocked Jeb. “I’ll tell you why! First, this is white man’s country. They should have never let you darkies out of slavery.”

“What’s slavery?”

“Don’t be playing dumb with me, boy. You know what slavery is—something your kind still should be in.”

“Jeb, please,” pleaded Ruth Ann. “He’s not human. He’s from another world.”

“You darn right, he’s from another world. Africa!”

“Jeb, let’s just hang the coon.”

“We will, but first I want this boy from another world to see what we do to race traitors. Hang her high, boys.” They put a rope around Ruth Ann’s neck, threw it over a branch, and lifted her off the earth until she was dead, dead, dead. Just like that, she was gone. I could no longer feel her presence—her love for me or that of life.

“Now don’t she just look nice hanging from that tree and all?”

“It’s time to die, boy.” The others laughed as they put a rope around my already bleeding neck.

“Any last words, boy, before you meet that black God of yours?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Then say it. I don’t want to be late for supper.”

“You must understand, when I first touched Ruth Ann back in that restaurant, I instantly knew everything she knew. Her hopes, the things that made her happy, even her favorite color, which was sky blue. Not only that but I could recall every book that she had read. There was this one book that she really loved. I mean really loved with all her being.”

This book also had a creature with a name that I had adopted, so I spoke my last words, “Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord!” Only when I said it, it had an atypical effect on Jeb and the boys. This creature whose image I took from Ruth Ann’s mind was magnificent, yet dreadful. It was huge, much larger than a human, very huge. It had multiple wings, with a luminescence which surrounded its being. The eyes, the eyes were blazing like lightning, and its voice was like the sonorous roar of a mighty ocean. In my hand I held a flaming sword. Humans are such fragile things. Old Jeb and his racist friends just dropped dead right on the spot. By the expression on their faces, they died a detestable death.

I walked over to Ruth Ann’s dead body lying on the ground. This world has so much violence, so much hate, and why? Because some humans have melanin in their skin. It just doesn’t make any sense. Very gently, I laid her head on my lap. Tears fell from my eyes onto her lovely countenance. I yelled; I cried. Never before had I felt such anguish, such sorrow. “I should destroy this world!” I cried out. The entire planet began to tremble, and then I stopped. No, Ruth Ann loved this world. She loved it. I rubbed her face. Her eyes opened.

“Michael. . .What, where am I? I remember. . .uh. . . remember being enveloped in such love. It was like love was a blanket and I had it wrapped around me. I was dead, wasn't I?”

“Yes.”

“Is that possible? Are you God, Michael?”

“You humans are unsophisticated creatures. It took very little of my power to bring you back to life.”

“What about Jeb and the others?”

“You know what happened to them.”

“Yes, I guess I do.”

“How do you feel?” I asked.

“Kind of sleepy.”

“It's not sleep, Ruth Ann.” I looked away from her.

“What is it, Michael? What's wrong?”

“Ruth Ann, as powerful as I am, I can't . . .I can't bring you back from the dead. Not indefinitely.”

“I'm dying?”

“Yes.”

“How long do I have?”

“Maybe seven minutes.” I began to cry.

“Don’t cry, Michael. It’s not your fault. I’m the one who should be sorry.”

“You? Why should you be sorry?”

“Your first visit to our world, and what do we humans show you? Hate, violence, death.” The tears fell from my eyes like miniature waterfalls. “It’s not so bad, dying, I mean.” I said nothing.

“Michael,” said Ruth Ann, yawning, “show me your spaceship.”

“If you like,” I replied. My starship appeared overhead. As I said, it’s massive. It’s so enormous that it blocked the sun-light striking the earth and covered the entire world in total darkness. But my ship had many lights of every color. Ruth Ann began to cry.

“It’s so beautiful, so beautiful.”

“Ruth Ann, listen to me. I can’t stop you from dying in the form you’re in now, but I can change you, change you into something else.”

“Will I be able to go home with you, go aboard your starship?”

“Yes, but the blanket of love, Ruth Ann, it may be a long, long time before you’re wrapped up in it again.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she said, closing her eyes for the last time. “As long as I’m with you.”

“Do you like being a female?”

Ruth Ann smiled. “Did you like the kiss I gave you?”

We departed the earth, but before we did, I changed Ruth Ann into the archangel Michael, only a female archangel, if you can picture that!

Epilogue

I'm filling out my log entries when five of a hundred comes and stands beside me. I let him stand at attention for a few minutes before I begin speaking to him. "You know, five of a hundred," I say, "Calling your commanding officer an idiot—I could bring you up for insubordination."

"Sorry, sir, it will not happen again."

"I hope not," I reply.

"Sir?"

"What now?"

"What are you going to do about that exceedingly barbaric world that we discovered? Surely, you're not going to let them travel into the universe. They'll be like a virus, contaminating whole star systems with their hate, violence, and racism."

I had thought about this. It wouldn't be fair to the other intelligent life forms if I allowed these human beings to roam the starways on their own free will. No other beings think like them. Can you imagine so much evil and hate over skin color? "No, five of a hundred, I'm placing a containment field around their world and its only moon. That's as far as they'll be able to go. . .for now."

"What about the future?"

“If they change their evil ways, we’ll see.”

“Sir,” says five of a hundred, “what’s evil?”

“Never mind,” I retort. “By the way, how far before we reach home?”

“About five hundred quad zillion light-centuries, plus.”

“Good,” I acknowledged, “we’ll be home just in time for supper.”

Joel Reese

MOM, YOU MADE IT

You struggled as a teenager with the loss of your mother
at the age of 13, and
You made it.

You struggled with the loss of your first born
at the age of 17, and
You made it.

You struggled with a cheating spouse, and
You made it.

You struggled with an addiction to cocaine, and
You made it.

You struggled with the loss of your father
at the age of 23, and
You made it.

You struggled with raising four children
in the middle of Cleveland, and
You made it.

You were diagnosed with cancer at the age of 38, and
You made it.

You struggled with depression through life, and
You made it.

You were told eight years ago that you had
two years left, and
Look mom, You made it!

Taiesha Metcalf

PINE CONE STEW

In a small town, way up in the hills of West Virginia, winter came early one year. All the people in the small town gathered all of the food from their land and stored it away. This meant that some people were left with a little, while others had a lot. The snow came and the wind blew. The people of the small town huddled by their fires, eating whatever they had gathered from their fields. For weeks and weeks, no one went outside because the snow was so high.

A month passed and the snow finally melted, but the people would still not come out of their houses. One day a beggar showed up in the middle of the small town. People came out of their houses to see what he was doing there. The beggar asked everyone in the town for some food, but every one told him that they had none to give. Then the beggar asked for a big pot and everything he needed to build a fire. The beggar filled the pot with snow to let it melt. Then he got some pine cones from under a nearby tree and put them into the pot as well. The beggar took a big stick and began to stir the stuff in the pot. The people of the small town came out of their houses to see what was happening. The beggar asked for a spoon so he could taste his pine cone stew. "Hum," he said. "I think it needs some salt and a little pepper." A small voice answered, "I have some of that. Let me go get it."

After putting in the salt and pepper, the beggar tasted the stew again. "Hum," he said. "I think this dish could use something more, maybe some potatoes, a bunch of carrots, and a few onions. I don't know which would be better. I can't choose." Soon the people of the town brought some potatoes, some carrots, and some onions. The beggar put them into the pot. Then he tasted the stew.

Before he could say a word, a man said, "Why not add some beef, celery, and some cabbage?" as he put it in the pot.

As the stew began to cook, the air began to fill with a wonderful smell that caused the town to come together and make a grand meal. As everyone ate and had a good time, the small town finally realized that if they had all stayed together, no one would have gone hungry during that winter. Every winter after that, everyone stuck together and they never forgot the lesson about the beggar and the pine cone stew.

Kathy Boyd