

Russell Kelfer
Little
Jeremy
Raincloud

198-A
Series: Fictional Stories

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It was an all-too familiar scene. Third down and seventeen yards to go. The ball is on the Cougars' own four yard line. Here's the snap. Bob Fenton, the Cougars' first, second, and only-string quarterback, suddenly finds the elusive pigskin to be more than he can handle. The ball squirts free, and a rushing Tiger lineman who was already descending on Bob like a 400 pound vulture, descends on the football, instead. Touchdown, Tigers.

"That play turned the game ground." laughed Benny Erickson, the local radio sportscaster, "Why up until that moment, the Coogs were only behind, 38-0. Seven on-side kicks, and a few fumbles, and who knows?" The Cougar defense, who had already been on the field 72% of the game, fell apart, however, at that juncture. Final score: Bellvue Tigers 73, Midville Cougars 0.

"Well, we kept our perfect record intact" mumbled Cougar coach Jerry Hansen as he stormed into his living room after the game. "That was our fourth game, and we still haven't scored a point." "At least you're keepin' 'em guessin' Dad," young Samuel, the Hansen's fourteen year old son, responded. "Nobody knows when you'll up and score for the first time. It keeps the game exciting." "Thanks, boy," the weary coach murmured, "It's nice to know you get support at home."

At that moment, the front door flew open and a whirlwind blew through the house. Her name was Terri, and she was the Hansen's number one daughter, in fact their only daughter. Terri is sixteen, going on twenty-two, and, as she literally catapults from one place to another in her maroon and white cheerleader outfit, she looks as though she belongs to the winning team, instead of being Coach Hansen's daughter.

"Dad, Dad, listen...we thought up a new cheer." Terri screamed at the top of her lungs. This, incidentally, was on all too

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familiar entrance scene. You see, Terri eats, sleeps, and dreams cheerleading. Often, she wakes up in the middle of the night, bounds out of bed, and starts screaming at the top of her lungs

*"We're not cowards, hup, hup, hup
We don't win, but we never give up!" . . . Go-o-o-o Cougars!"*

At that moment, of course, the pajama-clad wonder woman came crashing to the floor, pom-poms in hand, and every member of the Hansen family, not to mention every dog in the neighborhood, came alive with fright.

So Coach Hansen could hardly wait to hear his daughter's latest thrust at literary immortality. He didn't have to wait long. "Okay, everybody, sit down," Terri screamed as loud as she could (which was her standard volume). Samuel offered to go get the rest of the family. "You have to come back, too" Jerry Hansen chided, almost jealous that his boy got to leave the room. Before long, in came Terrence Hansen, Terri's patient, but worn-to-a-frazzle mother, and little Jeremy Hansen, the youngest, and perhaps, the most interesting member of the family. Finally, sheepishly, Samuel returned as well. "No use hidin'", he mused, "I'd just get into trouble, and I can hear her anywhere in the house, anyway."

"Very philosophically astute", Dad Hansen commented. "I'm proud of you." Terri, meanwhile, was oblivious to it all. She actually thought they wanted to hear her latest limerick. As the family seated itself for the evening performance of Terri Hansen's "Hour of Cheers", the sense of expectancy was at an all-time low. Not only had Dad's team just gotten humiliated again, but Jeremy had once again established himself as the only form of acceptable entertainment at the game.

This time he did so by pouring hot popcorn over the head of Millie Mercedes, the 68 year old history teacher. Most students think she's an expert in ancient history because she was there. At any rate, Miss Millie, as they call her, had to rush from the stands amidst the laughter of the whole stadium, and little Jeremy got a standing ovation from the students. That was all he needed. Spurred on by his admiring audience, he proceeded to crawl up to the press booth, and taking the snoozing announcer by surprise, yelled into the microphone, "Boo Cougars, you lose too much". It was obvious to the most casual fan that this was none other than the coach's son, so this had not been a good day for the Hansens. At any rate, it was easier to listen to Terri's cheers

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than to explain to her why you couldn't, and anyway, they would sound better now than they would at four in the morning.

Terri, undaunted by the apparent lack of interest of her captive audience, took one of those cheerleader stances that give mothers premature gray hair. She perched one leg on Mom's new coffee table, the only piece of new furniture in the Hansen household, and stretched her left arm within a half inch of that antique lamp Aunt Essie had left the family in her will. (there may have been mixed emotions about that one; Dad may well have been quietly praying that it would go down with one of the rah-rah's, since he didn't like either Aunt Essie or the silly lamp.) Flinging herself with reckless abandon towards the floor, Terri shrieked her newfound cheer so loud the flowers in the vase on the far side of the room shook with fear:

*"Hey, Hey, Hey, Here's our new cheer!
We may not win a game this year.
But we've got class, by gosh, by gum
And we're gonna win in years to come.
G-o-o-o Cougars!"*

There was, needless to say, dead silence. Even Mom, who was Terri's cheerleader enthusiast to a fault, didn't know what to say. Finally, Dad broke the silence. "Child, did it ever dawn on you that your Dad is the coach of this team you are assuming won't win a game till next year? That would be like my taking out an ad in the Daily Chronicle that read 'Wanted: A Daughter who can pass Geometry'."

Big tears began to form in Terri's eyes; not because she had offended her Dad with her cheer, but because he had responded with such a low blow. She just couldn't hack geometry. "Dad... that's an unfair comparison. These cheers are to cheer you up... you're just...too...too...sensitive", she screamed. With that, she raced to her room sobbing, and another joyful evening at the Hansen's came to a close. (well, almost to a close!. I say almost, because everyone had been so busy trying to take in Terri's terrific cheers, they had not been paying attention to little Jeremy.) That's never a good thing to do.

"Mom," Samuel shrieked, "Where is Jeremy?" That one statement, "Where's Jeremy?" had become the byword of the Hansen household these last twelve years. Jeremy, you see was no ordinary child. He was one of those special gifts from God

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who came into this world somewhat damaged, but, given huge amounts of love and a few doses of special attention, turn into life's extraordinary people. Jeremy was a "Down Syndrome" baby. He had been born without the capacity to grow and to perform in many of the ways the world calls "normal". But Jeremy, like so many "special" children, had turned out to be a source of joy beyond comparison for the Hansen clan. Well, somewhat of a mixed kind of joy, perhaps.

Dad Hansen, you see, had envisioned a Heisman trophy candidate, when he learned that his wife was expecting again; and his somewhat fading "macho" image suffered a bit of a blow when little Jeremy was born, though he'd never admitted it to anyone. And he had learned to love little Jeremy, even though controlling the child's behavior seemed to be a chore that stretched beyond the limits of this family. The lad's awesome misbehavior at the game tonight was nothing compared to the shenanigans he had pulled in days gone by.

Perhaps his greatest evening ever came at the faculty family banquet last fall. That was the night he decided that Principal Poulson's cat, "Snipper" needed a bath. And the most logical place to bathe a cat at a party, at least in little Jeremy's mind, was in that big silver bathtub perched on the table next to the punch cups. Sure, the water was a bit purple, and sure, the glasses made an awful noise as they fell to the marble floor, but boy, did that cat have a time! And boy, did that make up a dreadfully dull party. (And boy, did that make it hard for little Jeremy to sit down for days to come.) But somehow the looks and the whispers of many of the teachers made it clear that not everyone appreciated the Coach's little gift from God. In fact, there was a motion made at the last faculty meeting that the next family function provide "special" activities for "special" people; meaning in short, that Coach Hansen leave little Jeremy at home.

So continuously destructive were little Jeremy's activities, that he had been given the nickname "Little Jeremy Raincloud" because wherever he went, a storm was sure to follow. At first, the family resented the nickname, but when Jeremy heard it, he took to it, and soon Dad, Mom, Samuel, and Terri were calling him "Little Jeremy Raincloud" as well. So you can see why, when Samuel hollered "Where's Jeremy?" it sparked the same kind of movement as a fire alarm; for something just as devastating was most likely about to happen.

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There was really no need to panic, however. They found little Jeremy perched on a stool in the kitchen playing with the buttons on the microwave oven. After all, what harm could be done with the controls on a microwave . . . unless . . . Dad lunged for the oven door just seconds before it was too late. Little Jeremy grinned. “Fwy Polly; Fwy Polly” he repeated devilishly. Polly was the family parakeet. And Polly was only microseconds from being microfried into oblivion.

That, of course, was compounded by the fact that when Dad gave his bird-saving lunge, his right arm tipped the edge of the mixmaster which was resting somewhat dangerously on the edge of the countertop, still gooey with the icing Mom was making for the “victory” celebration.. after the game, (should one ever occur). You guessed it. Down came the mixer, and into a million tiny pieces went the bowls. The beaters didn’t fare much better. They resembled that modern art sculpture nobody liked that was put out in front of the gym when it was dedicated.

Chalk up another typical evening in the life of little Jeremy Raincloud. But when he looked up at his Dad and Mom with those big blue eyes and feigned total innocence, they melted, much like Polly would have only moments later, and as they took turns hugging little Jeremy and assuring him they still loved him, their frightened, but confused parakeet, flew out of Dad’s hand, and right into the ceiling fan that circled the kitchen table. It was just as though God had called Polly’s number, and Jeremy had just been trying to make it more painless. So endeth another day in the life of little Jeremy Raincloud, and his somewhat bewildered family.

The Hansens’ religious life had been obviously affected by Jeremy as well. His presence in their lives gave them a sense of need, and an awareness of the existence of a God, but Jeremy’s presence in most churches produced a more unholy reaction. So the Hansens had gone from church to church looking for “just the right” place for little Jeremy. They thought they had found it at Memorial Church. The Sunday school teachers seemed accepting, if a bit condescending, and the Pastor even had once preached a sermon on welcoming “God’s special little people”. But the Hansens had noted that whenever Pastor Krueger had a chance to personally warm up to little Jeremy Raincloud, he always remembered a previous obligation and scurried away as though he had just been bitten by a cobra.

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What finished the Hansens at Memorial, however, was what has come to be known in Midville as “Baptism Sunday.” It all began between Sunday school and church. It was Terri’s job to get little Jeremy from his class and see that he made it with minor incident, if possible, to the sanctuary, where Mom Hansen, Midville’s version of a beaten, but not defeated, Erma Bombeck, was then responsible to keep the squirming, anxious little lad at bay, as Good Parson Krueger bellowed one of his emotional exhortations on nothing. This particular Sunday, however, Terri ran into Molly Martin, another Midville cheerleader, as she was dragging Jeremy, heels dug into the new red carpet, down the long hallway to the stairs that led to the balcony. The balcony, you see, was the safest place for Jeremy Raincloud. It was much less noticeable when Mom hustled him out the side entrance out of the view of the congregation, and the newly installed television cameras, which Pastor Krueger had insisted would give the Church_ “the kind of recognition it deserved”.

At any rate, Terri Just had to show Molly her newest cheer. “It just came to me in the night”, she modestly admitted; then without so much as a glance at the shocked parishioners who were trying to make their way down the long corridor, she dropped her Bible on the floor, fell down on one knee, raised her left arm slowly as though she were about to become a traffic cop, and literally shouted:

*“Stop, Cougars, Stop; we’ve had enough.
Losing them all is just too tough;
Try something different; try something new;
Why not score a touchdown or two?”
G-o-o, Cougars, Fight!”*

With that, the most effervescent of the Hansen clan jumped as high she could in high heels, which were her undoing, for as she came down, she landed on the edge of one of those heels, and went sliding across the carpeted floor, throwing on unexpected knee-high tackle into Widow Thornton as she went. The good widow, all 200 lbs of her, went crashing to the floor, injuring little but her pride; but Terri shrieked even louder as her left leg landed in a heap underneath about 190 of Widow Thornton’s 200 lbs. This could prove to be the costliest injury of the football season for the Midville Cougars. And as Deacon Philbury and Mrs. Thornton’s sister helped Molly tend to the wounded, no one even noticed that little Jeremy Raincloud had squirted, unaccompanied, up

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the stairs leading to the balcony.

But those stairs not only led to the balcony. For if you turned left, instead of right, at the top of the stairs, there was another pair of doors. One led to the choir loft, and still another to another series of additional steps that ended up at . . . oh, no! . . . the baptistry.

Little Jeremy Raincloud had always wanted to try out the baptistry. In fact, he had asked to be baptized no less than twelve thousand four hundred fifty two times. (Mom had been counting). It was not, you understand, a deep spiritual conviction that was driving him to test the waters. It was unsatisfied curiosity; curiosity that was about to be satisfied this Sunday. Now it's only fair to take note that this was Memorial Church's first Sunday on city-wide television. Pastor Krueger had hired a makeup crew to touch up the wrinkles on his face and powder out the gray in his hair; and much to the dismay of a skeptical Board of Deacons, had ordered a brand new pulpit, finished in a color of oak that he said ". . . blended just perfectly with his complexion". So it was doubly important this service go on without a hitch. In fact, the Parson was taking it all so seriously, you could almost imagine the Good Lord has a sense of humor to let this happen.

At any rate, Parson was immersed in the most heart-rending portion of his exhortation on humility, no less, when it happened. He first suspected something when he looked up from his notes, his pasted-on smile seeking recognition from the entranced masses, when he noticed that nobody was looking at him. He needed only to turn his head slightly to realize that all eyes were focused on the baptistry, where perched precariously on the precipice, preparing to preside was Little Jeremy Raincloud; almost speechless..but not quite. Jeremy, you see, when the heat was on, usually would repeat the last thing he had heard. And the last thing he had heard prior to his climb to baptismal recognition, was his sister's newest bid for cheer of the century. So, without compromising his contagious little smile, he shouted majestically:

"Stop, cougars, Stop Cougars, we've had enough."

What compounded the humor of it, if you so see humor, is that the little lad couldn't quite pronounce "Cougar" so it came out sort of like . . . you guessed it . . . "Krueger". In fact, most of the parishioners would swear to you when interviewed after the

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fact, that the little lad had cried out “Stop Krueger; Stop Krueger; we’ve had enough.”

“Most honest response I’ve heard to one of Krueger’s sermons, yet” Richard Fairfield was heard muttering afterwards. Nonetheless, Little Jeremy Raincloud had captured their attention. And the TV crew, not sure whether this was part of the Pastor’s planned extravaganza or not, took the cameras off the bewildered preacher and focused them on Little Jeremy Raincloud, who promptly forgot where he was and began to dance for joy.

It wasn’t long until all you could hear was another “Stop, Krueger, Stop, Krueger, we’ve had enough” followed by the loudest splash that ever came from Memorial’s baptismal waters, as little Jeremy fell, head first, into the tank. Oh, don’t worry, Jeremy could swim. But after Mom and Dad Hansen rescued the little tyke, dripping wet, on city-wide television, and they were greeted with an EMS worker who informed them that they were loading their daughter in the ambulance for a trip to the emergency room, caused by a cheerleader fall in the church corridor, the Hansens felt that perhaps God, (and at that point they weren’t sure there was one) was telling them to find another church..another very understanding church at that.

It was nearly Christmas time before the Hansens ventured into a church again. The football season had ended, and it ended on a more positive note, the fighting Cougars scoring their first touchdown of the year in the final quarter of the final game, against the fourth string of Mansville High. It was hardly enough to get Dad Hansen the “Coach of the Year” honors, but as he humbly stated in an interview after the game, “It gives us some momentum to start the next season.” Just behind him, in full view of the camera, was his dramatic daughter, Terri, pom-poms clutched beside her crutches, leading a gleeful cheer, hoping for some kind of national recognition or something. At any rate, football was over, and Christmas was the next major event on the horizon.

Even the Hansens realized you go to church at Christmas. It was sort of a tribute you paid to God, like going to a birthday party for someone you like. Dad had suggested asking Doctor Harrison for a shot of Demerol for little Jeremy in order to protect the sanctity of the season, but Mom acted repulsed by the thought. No one will ever know what she really thought. At any rate, it was

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the Sunday before Christmas, and the Hansens got all dressed up for their first major appearance in a religious setting since the Pearl Harbor of the baptistry that October morning.

They decided to visit Bridge Street Bible Church, since they heard they were having a Christmas musical, and since upon investigating, they found out Bridge Street didn't have a baptistry. "That ought to make the service harmless, and the surroundings safer for Jeremy", Coach Hansen reasoned with himself.

And believe it or not, the music was superb. It was a reasonably small building, and though it was obvious that the choir had homemade robes, and a volunteer director, the lack of professionalism was actually refreshing. The performance was a story, set to music of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, followed by a brief explanation in song of what one vocalist referred to as "being born again", or "meeting Jesus". This kind of terminology was somewhat new to the Hansens, and an outsider looking on would never have known what they might have been thinking. Terri, no doubt, was trying to make a cheer out of it. Dad was probably waiting for it to end, so he could go home and watch the NFL playoffs on television. Samuel and Mom were politely entranced. Whether it was genuine or not, no one knew.

The interesting thing to watch was the face of Jeremy Raincloud. He never budged. He didn't squirm. He didn't use his "Gotta go baffroom" technique to get he and Dad out of the sanctuary. He just listened and looked and sat perfectly still in the pew.

The Pastor, a young man, had obviously been moved himself by the presentation, and he stood to his feet and began to share a little about his own life, as he asked the congregation to think about what had just been said and sung. Coach Hansen began squirming as little Samuel began shuffling his feet. But just listening to him, you knew he wasn't like most preachers you'd heard. His voice was somewhat crackly; his words poorly formed; his speech a bit difficult to understand; and he walked with a decided limp. But there was something uniquely supernatural' about every word he spoke. It seems that Pastor Higgins, as the flock referred to him, had been born with a serious birth defect, and had been given less than three years to live. He hadn't been able to speak until he was five; didn't walk 'till he was ten. As he

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shared these things about himself, the crowd became hushed, and even Dad Hansen appeared to be listening. Pastor Higgins went on. He said:

“As I grew older, my life was lived one day at time. I never knew if this year would be my last. I never knew if others were simply tolerating me because they felt sorry for me. My whole life was filled with insecurity and fear. Then one day, someone told me about Jesus. I don’t mean they told me that Jesus was born, and died, and rose again. I knew that from Sunday school. Someone told me that Jesus Christ died for me! They explained to me that God had allowed me to be created the way He had so that I would have a greater need in my life; a need that only He could fill. They told me that I was one of God’s “special” people, designed to be used in a special way. I couldn’t talk right; I couldn’t walk right; I couldn’t sing right. All I could do was stutter and stammer and stagger around. I could see no reason for living. Then someone explained to me what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians, chapter twelve about ‘God’s strength being perfected in weakness’. And they told me that my frail body was an empty vessel, not pretty at all in itself, but that if Jesus came in, there would be nothing in the way of letting His Light shine through.”

So I asked Him to come in. I asked Jesus to enter my weak, stumbling, insecure life, and do with it whatever He chose; to make of me whatever God had envisioned in His original plan.

The Pastor paused now. Tears were running down his cheeks, and throughout the congregation, you could see others begin to weep as well. He went on:

“I want you to know that Jesus Christ did just what He said He would do. He entered my life; cleansed my life; and gave my life meaning. Everyone knew I couldn’t do anything right. So as God began to change my life, no one could ever be confused about who had done it. Whenever I would speak, as I am doing now, it was obvious God was speaking, because I couldn’t even carry on a conversation before. Whenever I would share with someone else what Jesus had done for me, no one ever doubted that it was a miracle, for I was nothing before! And, beloved, I am convinced that some of you listening to me today, are just as insecure; just as helpless; just as useless as I was.”

He concluded: “May I invite you to ask Jesus to come into your hearts today? What a Christmas present to give to God. Give

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Him yourself.”

Pastor Higgins bowed his head, and the choir began to sing. This was all somewhat foreign to the Hansen family, and you could see them peeking from behind their hymnbooks, one by one, to see what would happen next. They didn't quite know what to make of it, but they were moved.

In fact, so moved by it all was Terrence Hansen, that she had completely forgotten about her little Jeremy Raincloud. She reached down by her side to give him an encouraging hug, but ...uh-oh! he was gone! “Oh, no,” she cried under her breath; we'll be blackballed by another church!” She jerked her head up so hard, she almost pulled it out of its socket, and began to peer around quite irreligiously for her missing, mischievous child. She searched the choir loft first. No Jeremy. She looked up at the chandeliers with fear and trembling No Jeremy. She looked for a row of parishioners who were scrambling uncomfortably as though someone were crawling under their feet. No Jeremy. Finally, somewhat as an afterthought, she looked down at the front where Pastor Higgins was standing. There, with his arms locked around the Parson in a genuine bearhug, was little Jeremy Raincloud.

Just at that time, the Pastor turned to the congregation and said,

“I have a young man here; a young man I can identify with, who wants to say something to the congregation.” Mom Hansen's heart went AWOL. Dad began to slide lower and lower in the pew, until he found himself sliding onto the floor. Terri just knew her little problem brother was going to recite her latest cheer, which wasn't very favorable to her Dad's team. No one on their row breathed or blinked on eye. “Tell the congregation what you just told me, Jeremy,” the Pastor whispered kindly. “Tell them.”

The silence was deafening. It was broken only by the gentle sobs of little Jeremy Raincloud, as he quietly spoke into the microphone. “I just asked Gee-Jus to come into my heart. I'm weak, too. I asked God to make me strong.” Then he began to sob again, but to the Pastor, and to much of the congregation, little Jeremy's tears were like glistening stars that twinkled in the heavens to signify that a new light and a new life had taken hold of a very weak little boy. It was obvious, to those who had eyes to see, that God had just taken possession of a raincloud.

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The Hansen family didn't know quite what to make of it. On the one hand, they were relieved that Jeremy wasn't setting the cloak room on fire, or making paper airplanes from pages of the hymnbook (both of which he'd done before). On the other hand, they weren't sure just what they would do after all this "Gee-jus" stuff wore off. Still a third thought made its way through Mom Hansen's mind. It was "What if this is why God made my boy like this?"

What if this is why he was born? What if God (if there is a God) wants to use him to be special because he is so weak?" These were all new thoughts to Terrence Hansen; thoughts she dare not share even with her husband for the moment, lest she be branded a religious fanatic. "I guess only time will tell", the harried, but hopeful mom concluded. "Only time will tell."

And time did. When little Jeremy Raincloud awakened the next morning, he bounded out of bed, fell to his bedside and began to pray. No one knows just what he prayed. But you could see a piece of paper by his side. On it, he had scribbled words that stood for things he had done that were wrong. He was asking God to forgive him. It took a long time! You could almost tell by how long it took, when he got to the "kitty bath" and the "baptistry dance" incidents.

Believe it or not, there were no natural disasters in the Hansen home that day. It was Christmas Eve, and the sheer excitement of Christmas Eve had always made it one of Jeremy Raincloud's cloudiest days. In fact, for three years running, the Christmas tree had been assaulted in various ways. One year it had been set on fire. The next year, when no one was looking, he had sprayed it with orange paint. Last year, the worst year yet, Jeremy had tied the dog to the tree, then stuck the dog with a pin. As the howling canine tried to evacuate the premises, he took tree, presents, lights, and part of the house with him. "Bad dog" Jeremy had exclaimed. "Bad dog"!

But this Christmas eve was quiet at the Hansen house. Christmas carolers stopped by to sing, and instead of climbing on the roof, or throwing plates at them (both of which he'd done before as well), Jeremy began to sing with them. "Sealant night; holly night; all is cool; it's all right" he sang with great feeling. The words weren't perfect, but the heart was. The carolers asked Jeremy to go with them as they continued their rounds.

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Hesitantly, the Hansens agreed. He had a ball.

The next morning, as everyone opened their presents, instead of throwing things, and ripping things, Jeremy Raincloud sat quietly and opened each of his gifts, one at a time. After each one, he would grin so big, his smile would literally light up the room, and he'd say "Gank You". He was grateful! Jeremy was grateful. Something had happened to Jeremy Raincloud. At Christmas dinner, Jeremy asked if he could say "grace". There were seventeen relatives there, but Mom Hansen insisted that he be given a chance. As the delightful aroma of turkey and dressing filled the room, everyone bowed their heads, and little Jeremy Raincloud prayed this prayer:

"Merry Christmas Gee-Jus! Thank you for how you made me. Thank you that I'm not like ever-body else. Thank you that I need you, so I asks you in my heart. Thank you fer fer—givin' my sins. Thank you for making me a Christmas gift to you. Make ever-body here want to love you too. Amen."

It was one of the quietest Christmas dinners the Hansen household had ever had, and by far the most blessed. Nobody there really understood what had happened to Jeremy Raincloud. But everybody there understood that something had happened.

It's been a lot of years since that Christmas when Jeremy Raincloud heard about weakness and strength. A lot of years. I was there, and I was amazed; but I couldn't help but wonder whatever happened to that different little boy. "Oh, well," I surmised, "There are some things we're just not supposed to know." It all came back to me, however, one day, not too long ago, as I was visiting a little church not too far from my house on Christmas Eve.

It was a musical presentation, not at all unlike the one I heard that December morn when Jeremy met Jesus! It wasn't real professional, but it was real! And I enjoyed it all, but there was something about that young man at the piano that intrigued me. He talked differently; and he sang differently; but there was a glow about him that literally consumed the room and captivated the audience. I whispered to the young man sitting next to me. "Who's that young man playing the piano?" "I don't know his last name", he responded, "but for some reason, they call him 'Jeremy Sunshine'. They say he brings sunshine wherever he goes."

Suddenly it made sense. It really had happened. God had

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taken someone the world thought was a nothing, and turned him into a treasure. God had taken one of the world's so-called "rejects" and made him into a trophy of love. God had created a young man with a need so real that no one could ever confuse who he was with what he became. And then He so filled that need with Himself that a walking disaster became a monument of grace.

You say, "Is that the end of the story?" No. The story of Jeremy Raincloud doesn't have an ending. You see, in that sanctuary that day, there were three guys sitting in the third row who just seemed to glow with Jeremy Sunshine every time he sang. One of them was blind. Jeremy had found him in a half-way house getting cured of drug abuse. And he told him how Jesus wanted to make him strong. One of them had muscular dystrophy and was twisted and crippled. Jeremy met him in a grocery store one day, and asked him if he would like to know how to stand tall in the eyes of God. The one sitting next to him is a cancer victim. He doesn't have long to live. But now at last, he's living and he's getting ready to live forever. He met Jeremy Sunshine, too.

So, you see, there is no end to the story. Gary, that blind boy in the third row, went home for Christmas and told his grandmother that though he couldn't see, now he could see God. And his grandmother asked Jesus into her heart. The next day, she invited a neighbor over for Christmas dinner; a neighbor who had been plagued with depression and guilt for thirty years. Gary's grandma told the woman about Jesus, and she became a Christian, too. The neighbor wrote her son in New York, who had been searching for years to find himself, and told him what had happened to her. He flew home to see for himself. He, too, received the Life of God.

So praise God, this story will never end. It may even have a chapter devoted to you. Because maybe you've heard for the first time today that God designed you just as you are, so He can take you just as you are, and make you just as you are, into a living portrait of Jesus. Maybe this is the day you'll decide to pray with little Jeremy:

"Merry Christmas Gee-Jus! Thank you for how you made me. Thank you that I'm not like ever-body else. Thank you that I need you, so I asks you in my heart. Thank you fer fer—giving my sins. Thank you for making me a Christmas gift to you. Make ever-

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body here want to love you too. Amen.”

You too, can pray that prayer right now. You too, can open your heart, ask God to forgive your sins, and ask Jesus to come into your heart. You can do that right this very minute. Christmas will come alive in you, and you will walk into the sunlight of God’s love with a song in your heart; and you’ll go forth, just as Jeremy did, and tell another, who’ll tell another, who’ll tell another.

And the story will go on and on . . .

And on and on

. and on.

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