

## **The Promise**

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Casey Pifer

Jefferson High School, Jefferson County

Grades 9 & 10

*“I met God’s Will on a Halloween night. He was dressed as a bag of leaves.”*

The last few notes of the woman’s voice rang through the small ‘hunk of junk’ I called my car as the song ended. My body shook heavily with sobs, and I struggled to keep control over the wheel of my car. A few tears fell into my lap, and I looked away from the rain pounding and splattering on the windshield to switch off the radio. The song playing had been about a little boy with muscular dystrophy who had changed somebody’s life. This reminded me of somebody so much that my heart ached. *My brother.*

The words floated in the air like humidity in the hot summer sun.

*Carson.*

His name hung in my mind. I sucked in a deep breath of air and held it inside. Now that his name was there, memories of my little brother flooded uncontrollably to me.

*“Jackie!” The tiny boy ran into my room with a smile as bright as the sun itself; the only things hindering him were the heavy braces on his legs. Struggling to get atop my bed, he pulled breathlessly on my pant leg. “Jackie, Jackie, JACKIE!” He screeched joyfully.*

*I picked him up, “Whatty? Whatty? WHATTY?” I shouted back jokingly.*

*“Come here,” he demanded, already struggling out of my lap and off the bed. “I got something to show you,” he said matter-of-factly as he pulled persistently on my hand.*

*Grinning, I followed the four year old little boy out of my room, down the stairs and out of the back door. My brother stopped short and pointed to the sky, his dark curls falling away from his face as he tilted his head back. I followed the direction of his finger and realized his excitement. A rainbow. “It’s beautiful, baby,” I whispered, my smile as big as his own.*

*“See?” he panted. “I knew you would like it,” he said, looking up at me, thrilled with my pleasure. His eyes sparkled with a question. “But what is it?”*

*Remembering what our grandfather had told me when I was little, I answered him. “It’s a rainbow,” setting him on the rail of the deck and giving him a little squeeze. “It’s God’s way of telling us he loves us.”*

A roll of thunder broke above me and brought me back to my senses. Ahead of me, a black hearse was slowly driving, and behind me there was a long funeral procession of cars. I glanced into my rearview mirror just long enough to see my tear soaked face. I smacked the palm of my hand onto the steering wheel, trying to somehow chase the memories away from me. It was useless. Memories of my little brother poured through my head like sand through a sift. The day he was born. The first time he said my name. Finding out about the muscular dystrophy. Helping him learn to swim. The day he died.

I was slowly moving toward the cemetery, and as the memories finally passed, my tears slowed. When we came to a stop in the driveway I slumped down in my seat and took a breath. I quickly swept my hand across my cheeks, trying to erase the traces down my face. Sighing in defeat, I opened the car door to get out. Alaina was standing outside of my car with an outstretched hand. My best friend pulled me from my car and into a sympathetic embrace. She slipped her arm through the crook of mine, and we walked silently, heads down, to the grave.

As we quietly sang every verse of Amazing Grace, I became aware of the rain slowing and finally coming to a stop. Obviously noticing this too, Alaina lowered the umbrella, and I felt the sun above me. Puzzled by the sudden halt of the three day downpour, I blinked. Still mumbling the words of the song, I searched the sky. There it was. It was the brightest rainbow I had ever seen, brilliant against the pale sky. Drawing in a sharp breath, I recalled the last minutes I had shared with my brother.

*“Jack?” He had whispered when I walked into the tiny white hospital room.*

*“What is it, Ace?” Nearly choking on my words, but managing to make them sound normal.*

*“Do you think...” he stopped and struggled for enough breath. “Do you think God will let me send you a rainbow? You know...so I can tell you how much I love*

*you?” My eyes filled with tears as I tried to answer this remarkable little boy, my brother.*

*“I’m sure it won’t...be a problem.” I swallowed hard and felt the first tear roll down my cheek. Shaking my head, “All you have to do is ask.”*

*“Okay then... I will. I promise.” The faint glimmer of a smile played at his lips as he closed his sparkling green eyes for the last time.*

Now, staring at the shimmering rainbow, I smiled for the first time in what felt like ages. A warm happiness spread through me as I realized that everything was going to be okay. I knew it would be. It had to be. If Carson could send me this miracle, I could make it through this short lifetime and make the most of it. Of course, I would miss my brother. But never again did I cry about him leaving us. I knew he was in a better place, and I would just have to be patient until I could see him again.