

# Section Four

## *Adventures and Connections*

Extended Articles and Short Stories



*Photo by Osamah Ahmed Alhamdan*

Bethany Moore

### Welcome to Paradise Island

Take a few seconds to think of a place you have been that has been beautiful, warm, inviting, and fulfilling with things you have always wanted to do and food you have always wanted to eat all in one. If you can not think of a place, allow me to help you out. Perhaps for your vacation this year, you will arrive in the Bahamas, a country made up of 700 tropical islands southeast of the Florida coast. One of the popular islands of the Bahamas is Paradise Island. Paradise Island is not only popular because of its glamorous beaches, but also because of Atlantis. Atlantis is a five star resort located along the beach of Paradise Island. Year round sun and crystal clear warm water of all shades of blue surround this luxurious resort. Countless luscious palm trees and pools for all ages paint a dazzling picture. Oxford English Dictionary defines paradise as “A place or region of surpassing beauty or delight, or of supreme bliss. Now also: a peaceful unspoilt place.” Atlantis was probably chosen for Paradise Island because it puts this definition into real life. Paradise is often used to describe a part of heaven; a place no living person has experienced. Thankfully, God has blessed us by providing numerous beautiful places on earth to give us a taste of what this paradise will be like. Although not paradise itself, Atlantis is a taste of paradise, a place of surpassing beauty, delight, and supreme bliss.

As the boat glided across the Bahamian water towards the island, my fellow classmates and I were about to arrive at the destination of our senior trip. We could see the peach colored hotel from a distance. Its color imitated the color of a conch seashell and its size compared to a skyscraper placed amongst palm trees. As we arrived in our boat, I looked down and could see all the way to the bottom of the turquoise ocean. As

we road in a bus to Atlantis the scenery gave us a glimpse of what the next three days would be like. Palm trees, beaches, beach houses, and shops made us forget our homework and jobs we had left behind in Kansas. Nothing could quench our senioritis more than the Bahamas. It was like a picture being painted before our eyes as the many shades of greens, blues, and reds came alive upon our arrival at Atlantis. Apart from the colors, awaiting us were pools, rides, restaurants, and activities for all ages. We arrived, unloaded, and immediately jumped in our bathing suits to catch some rays.

The attraction that caught our attention first was the Leap of Faith-one of many slides at Atlantis. The color of this pyramid-like structure was the same as the color of the hotel. Like the hotel, it accented the rich blue color of the water below. Anticipation was building up as we climbed the stairs to the top. What sounded like a waterfall grew louder as we began to reach the top. We could hear scream after scream as each person plunged down the slide. As I watched one after the other of my friends step up and disappear over the top, adrenaline began rushing through my veins as my fear of heights was at its peak. Knowing I could not just cop out now, I stepped up to the front of the slide and peered down. The slide looked as though it disappeared in midair. In front of me was a 90-foot vertical drop, and before I could stop myself I leaped with faith over the edge. What I could not see as I sped down the slide and through the tunnel, was that the tunnel carried me through an aquarium filled with sharks. You shoot so fast through the tunnel that you cannot see what you went through until you are actually looking back at the scene of the slide. Some sharks swim by the side of the aquarium and others right up next to the tunnel where only a thin piece of glass separates you from these feared creatures.

Thankfully, the pools do not have sharks, but some pools do have other ocean characteristics about them. We swam from pool to pool by little ten foot slides, and landed in one pool that tasted like the ocean. We immediately realized that this pool was different. What looked like all the other mini pools, felt like the ocean as the taste of salt water came to our lips. "This place never gets old," I said in disbelief. Even the water in the pools added a different flavor to the resort. Of all the water attractions, nothing was as beautiful as the ocean. The bottom of the deepest parts around the island could be seen as the bright sun peered down through the waves of the clear blue water. The sand was my favorite detail. Its soft, white, pink-tinted texture was much more unique than any other sand that had slipped through my fingers. Normal sand along the beaches of the U.S. is a tan color and at times coarse, but the sand in the Bahamas had a pink tint and was so fine it ran through my fingers like liquid. We were told that the pink specks were finely ground up conch shells from the bottom of the ocean. It was amazing how the manmade beauty of Atlantis accentuated the natural beauty of the ocean.

Besides the pools, the slides, and the pink sand, the best part of Atlantis are the aquariums. These are not just 10 foot long aquariums that people have in their houses. Some are aquariums the size of ponds and are scattered around Atlantis with different creatures such as hammerhead sharks that dart through the water and manta rays that scan the bottom of their habitat with their fins gracefully rippling through the water. They are everywhere, filled with large tortoises, sawfish, spotted rays, bright blue lookdowns, lionfish, and so many more. A dark tunnel that felt gloomy and solitary came to life with little aquariums along the wall filled with purple jelly fish, mini seahorses, glow in the dark fish, clown fish, and more. Each aquarium was filled with probably one hundred of

the same fish. However, my favorite was the bright tunnel beneath the one of the aquariums. It was a long tunnel stretching across the largest of the aquariums. It felt like I was walking underwater with the turquoise surrounding me and sharks skimming the top of my head as they swam above. Other large fish and small fish swirled around the tunnel walls and it felt as if I could reach out and touch their colorful scales. These aquariums were all around the resort. We spent a day trying to master all of them, but it would take more than two days to see each one in detail.

The aquariums were even scattered around the restaurant areas. We decided to splurge one night and eat at the Great Hall of Waters. This restaurant was surrounded by aquariums. The blue tint of the water glowed off the white walls as we sat to enjoy our gourmet dinner. Our plates were served with organized slices of duck, crab cakes, lobster, gourmet crab, and lobster. Our best outfits did not compare to the elegant evening dresses and suits other couples were wearing. The Great Hall of Waters was just one of more than fifty restaurants in Atlantis. These restaurants range from a grill inside a cave to ocean front dining to the traditional burger and fries. Satisfying the appetite was not the only delightful satisfaction in Atlantis. The Casino and bars were activities I was not allowed to participate in; however, walking through the casino was amazing to see hundreds of slot machines occupied with people. The ceiling was three stories high and the room contained over 800 machines and 78 tables. Almost every machine and table was occupied with old and young who could not be deterred from the game. To me, it did not make sense seeing people spending their time and money inside when they could be enjoying the beautiful aquariums, soaking up the warm Bahamian sun, or snorkeling

among dolphins and schools of fish. But, that is the beauty of Atlantis. Whatever your interest is, they have it.

This once in a lifetime experience (at least for me) does not come without costing a pretty penny. Prices are split up between the four different towers. We stayed at the beach towers, which are the cheapest accommodations ranging from \$370-\$485 a night. The Coral tower rooms range from \$475-\$1,300 a night. And depending on what part of the Royal towers you stay in, prices range from \$500- \$2,600 a night. Although these prices sound outrageous, special rates at certain times in the year make staying at Atlantis more affordable. Another option is to stay at another hotel on the island and purchase day passes to tour, swim, and participate in the activities at Atlantis.

It would take days to actually do everything that Atlantis offers. And it would take pages for me to share all of the unique details of Atlantis. I can promise you that you will not be disappointed if you check this place out. My suggestion is to plan beforehand what sounds fun or interesting and take your time and enjoy it. Nothing in Atlantis is designed half way. From the location of the resort to the water in the pools, they know how to make paradise come to life.

From *Frank of the Flower*, chapter 3

Frank was trying his best to be quiet walking up the stairs with a computer in his arms. He made it to the top of the stairs and was almost to his door when the keyboard fell off the CPU. He dropped the monitor, but managed to keep hold of the CPU. He set it down by the door and fumbled with his keys. Creaky stuck his head out the door.

"Hey, Frank you OK?"

"Sorry. Yeah, I'm fine."

"Thought you were coming in drunk. What's that?"

"Come on in. It's a computer. I couldn't sleep so I went out and found this at a garage sale. I bought it for \$25"

"Great deal, I guess. It looks a little old."

Frank sat down on the floor and started attaching plugs. "Yep. This baby's got some history. I can hardly wait."

Creaky sat on the bed and rubbed his face. Frank flipped a switch and the monitor lit up. "Good. I was afraid the fall might have done it in."

"That's windows 95, man."

"Yeah. It's a treasure."

Creaky got up off the bed and looked over Frank's shoulder. It didn't seem to be booting up right. "Maybe you did damage it."

"Nah. I only dropped the monitor." He was punching some keys as letters and numbers scrolled by. "Dang it. There's an operating system here, but it's a little holey."

"Holy?"

"Yeah. Parts are missing. Don't think I've ever seen this before. Doesn't really seem like there's enough here to run, but it does."

Creaky looked around behind the CPU. He picked up a power cord. "Could this be the problem?"

"Did I forget to plug that in?"

"You've got to have it plugged in some other way, right?"

"I don't know." They both started pulling on cords and poking around the back.

"No, man. This isn't plugged in anywhere," said Creaky.

"Oh."

"How could that be?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever seen this before?"

"No."

Creaky studied the plug. "Is this a signal input problem?" he asked.

"I wasn't really talking about current, but electricity's a kind of input signal, I guess. Plug it in."

"OK."

Creaky plugged it in. The monitor and computer shut down.

"Unplug it." Creaky did. The monitor and CPU started up again.

"Hey, that's downright creepy. I say we take a sledgehammer to this."

"I don't know. It's interesting."

"I'm serious. This thing needs to be in pieces."

"It creeps me out a little bit, too, but it's shown some resistance to the usual methods of shut-down. I think we'll need to study this a bit. For now, plug it in."

Creaky did. It shut down.

"Out the window, man, I'm serious."

Frank shrugged. "It's OK for now." He looked at his watch. "And I need to get in the shower and get cleaned up. I've got a placement exam today." He looked at the computer.

"Maybe this is some form of good luck."

"I don't know about that. How can it work when it's not plugged in? It's haunted."

"It doesn't seem like it should work. But it's not haunted. There's no such thing."

"Whatever you say, but I'm not setting foot inside this room again until it's gone. In fact, I'm out of here now." Creaky left.

- Jenell Williams



## Pirate's Gold

One of the qualities that links all humanity is the ability to tell a story. Think about your day. How much of your day do you spend listening to or telling a story in some form? I bet our little brains spend more energy on stories than on anything else; each person knows a countless number of them. So, I wonder what makes some stories better than others? I mean, I'll admit that some stories I've heard are just plain dull, but is it just action that makes a good story? I don't think so. I think that by passion, good stories rise above the endless drudge of the mundane ones that saturate our lives. Passion instills a story with a spark, a spark that can trigger a beautiful reaction, a reaction that slices through the layers of apathy and disassociation that surrounds the heart. Well, I have a story. I hope that it sparks that beautiful happening inside of you, but I won't be sad if it doesn't happen. You see, when I tell you this story, I get to rekindle the spark the memory holds within my own heart. Is this a selfish end for storytelling? I suppose so. But what do we look for more in life, a storyteller or an audience?

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I was nine years old and doing what every child does during summer vacation, facing the challenge of filling another day with activity. It was mid-July, and I began to feel the dreadful shadow of the upcoming school year. My mom had the pleasure of working a full shift at the town's textile plant, and my dad had the pleasure of doing whatever he did. I don't actually know what my dad did that summer; when I was five, I remember seeing him go through our door with a tattered brown suitcase in one hand and a bundle of shirts in the other. He left the door open, and I watched as he put the bundles in the passenger seat of his '71 Cheyenne truck with rust-hole air-conditioning. He shut

the door, walked toward me, smiled, and ruffled my hair. That was all. I watched him drive away; months passed before I admitted he wasn't coming back.

With the absence of mom from eight in the morning until five in the evening, my summer vacations were always a practice in fighting away the loneliness. There was no possibility in my mom affording a babysitter for six days a week, so she left me every morning except for Sunday to my own devices for nine hours. I know this practice would be considered neglect by social standards, but I usually had no trouble passing the time. Usually. Anyway, I had the entire house to play in, although "entire" yielded not much more room than a portion would. A single minimum income can only buy so much length of wall before strained to instability.

On this particular day, I had a plan. I was going to ride my bike the four-block length to the neighborhood playground and fight imaginary hordes of assaulting pirates from my stronghold, the playground's termite-ridden log cabin. I had already defended this crumbling structure from imaginary invaders seven times by that point in the summer, and I was beginning to run out of ideas for villainous troops. Since the summer's beginning, I had fought a legion of skeletons trying to steal my body organs for their own use, a fleet of spaceships bent on conquering our planet, a band of Vikings lusting after the imaginary women within the cabin's interior, a tribe of Indian warriors trying to scalp the final soldier of Custer's army, a brigade of Nazis attempting to destroy the last building of Allied resistance, a pack of ravenous wolves intent on sampling me as a morsel of grub, and an entire cemetery's worth of zombies desiring to do the same. Needless to say, when you have to spend extended periods of time entertaining yourself, your imagination strengthens just as your bicep does from curling weights.

I had pumped my imagination to Schwarzeneggerian bulk, and when I entered into these solitary struggles, reality quickly became pliable. I didn't see an empty playground; I looked upon the legions of enemies with excitement and even fear. The war cries, gunfire, and clash of steel all assaulted my senses. At times, I honestly forgot my fights weren't really happening. I emerged from each of these confrontations as the victor, and all of my glory in battle was due to my sidearm, a stick of about four feet in length with the magical ability to transform from long sword to musket to machine gun to laser cannon. Anyone who had a lonely childhood understands the magic of a good stick.

One can only hold the forces of evil off for so long before appetite gets the best of him. I started to feel a slight tremor in my stomach mid-battle and decided that breakfast would be a good idea. Curious about the time, I checked my plastic Spider-Man watch with the wall-crawler's picture on the side of the watch's rubber band. The watch had been a present for my ninth birthday, only three months prior, and the watch's face already had a small web of cracks from striking a rock. I didn't mind; to me the cracks made it look like some of Spider-Man's webbing clung to the watch. Besides, I could still read the time. 9:15. I had defended my fort from pirate attack for 45 minutes, and I decided that this was not too shabby for a morning's work before breakfast. Laying my stick inside the ancient-looking log cabin, I climbed onto my bike and pedaled toward Fay's Kitchen.

One thing you have to know about Fay's Kitchen, I was fascinated with it. The interior of the restaurant was wooden walls, and a yellowed-white vinyl floor stretched across the one room dining area. Scattered across the wooden walls was a hodgepodge of items eccentric enough to captivate a child's attention and gaudy enough to ensure only a

disturbed glance from adults. Race car pictures with scribbled signatures occupied the better portion of one wall, and I wondered how someone could collect so many famous racers' signatures. I didn't yet realize that the penmanship in each signature was the same; this epiphany came years later. On the opposite wall was a clock in the shape of a rabbit wearing a blue suit with a white collar. The brown fur peeked out of the suit's ends, and the feature that I thought was the neatest was the movement of the rabbit's eyes from left to right, each sway marking a second's passage. The number one reason I came to this place, though, was not the décor and certainly not the food. I enjoyed the joint's pancakes, but the enjoyment was not love. The first time I ever went to this restaurant was with my mom when I was seven, and I knew that the waitress who would serve us would be named Fay. It was her kitchen after all. I was shocked when our waitress had a blue nametag with "Sue" stamped in white letters upon it. I asked her where Fay was, and she answered, "Fay's out of town, sweetie," without moving her eyes from my mother. I made a promise to myself, for a reason I don't even know, that I would meet Fay and she would be my waitress. Fay had been out of town for almost two years on this particular morning. I still hadn't given up.

I leaned my bike on its kickstand at the side of Fay's and pushed open the heavy, metal-framed door, shoving with both arms and an arched back. I heard the immediate rattle of the rusted Christmas bell hanging above the door, and a head immediately poked into view from the back area of the kitchen. It wasn't Fay; I knew this particular waitress as Ronda. She greeted me with the usual "hello, hon, have a seat." Ready for pancakes, I climbed into a corner booth, one of the only available booths left, and sipped the glass of water Ronda soon brought me.

After eating the syrup-slathered pancakes, I decided that duty called, and I should get back to my defensive position at the park's log cabin. I heaved open the weighty door, hearing the farewell bell-jingle and bid hello to the sun, already cooking in the morning sky. I rounded the corner of the building where I had propped my bike and stopped. The bike wasn't there.

Panic began to trickle into my chest, squeezing all of the breath out of my lungs. I knew I had left the bike at that spot, and for a moment I just stood motionless, thinking that the bike would just reappear where it was supposed to be. Nothing reappeared, and I began pacing around Fay's Kitchen to make sure it wasn't parked anywhere else. After three loops around the building, I accepted that my bike was not leaning against the building as I had left it. Someone must have taken it, and I felt the full weight of my loss. To a nine-year-old boy, a bike is a friend. Any object that instills you with the speed necessary to explore where you need to explore quickly develops sentimental ties to the owner. I had even given my bike a name.. And now Speedy was gone, bearing the rear of some punk thief God knew where. I sat on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant in despair, not knowing what I should do next. Thinking into the future, I knew my mom would kill me when she heard about Speedy's theft and that I would be without a bike for a long time to come. Money was much too tight for such expenses. Thinking of nothing better to do, I stood and began my walk back to the park, eyes searching for Speedy in all directions.

By the time I returned to the park, I was still without my bike. I felt defeated, and the idea of continued battle against pirate hordes was not as appealing as it had been when I had finished my breakfast. I returned to the wooden cabin to get my stick and

decided to just wander around the park for a little while and think about what I could do about my bike. Looking around at the park, I noticed that only a few parents were around today and most of the playground equipment was unoccupied. The swing set was full of children with a line of parents behind them, arms outstretched in anticipation. Other than that, the equipment was free, and I knew that such opportunities did not happen often. I had learned about the institution of lines while waiting for a turn on one of the various wooden constructions of that playground. At that time, however, in a moment when the playground stretched before me free of the frustration of lines, I didn't feel like playing. If I had known what irony meant, it wouldn't have been lost on me. I did see a pair of wooden benches, an old man already sitting in one of them. Sitting seemed like a good idea, an idea that would let me focus on what I could tell my mom when she asked me where my bike was. Approaching one of the benches, I scanned it for an area free from bird droppings and squatted into the wooden seat, letting a sigh escape as I did so.

The old man sitting next to me looked over at me when I sat. He grinned at me and said, "You sound like I do when I sit down. You're way too young to sound so old. I hope, though, that you don't have as much trouble standing back up as I do."

I wasn't in the mood for jokes, and I answered the man "I can get up just fine" flatly and without turning my head to look at him. He continued to look at me, the grin still on his lips. I held my stick in my lap, examining it with pride even in the sadness I felt.

"Say, that's a nice stick you found there, kid! When I was your age I would have loved to have a fine stick like that."

The old man's words had won me over, and I looked up at him with a smile of gratitude. I thought to myself that this man was an arborary connoisseur who could appreciate my superior specimen.

"Thanks. My dad got it for me when he had to cut down a tree. He told me it was the best piece of wood in the whole tree and that it was as strong as metal. Wanna see it?"

"Sure, I'd love to." I handed the stick to the old man, noticing how bad his hand shook as he outstretched it. "Mind if I try her out?"

"Go ahead!" I answered, laughing at the sight of the old man wielding the stick as if it were a sword, much in the same fashion as I did. He handed the stick back to me, nodding to me in thanks.

"Glad I got you to brighten up a bit. Say, kid, if you don't mind me asking, what's got you so sad? It ain't right for a kid to be sad on a beautiful summer day, such as we have."

"My bike's gone. I don't know what I'm gonna do. My mom is gonna kill me! I had it this morning, but when I came out of breakfast, it was gone! My mom is really gonna kill me! She was always telling me that I should chain it, and she even bought me a chain I could lock around it, but I'm not too good with combinations, you know?"

"Hold on there, kid...say, what's your name?"

"Jake."

"Well, hold on there, Jake. First of all, nobody's gonna kill you. Your ma might get mad, but that will pass. It always passes with moms. Second, your bike might turn up yet. You know, I've been around on this earth a long time, going on seventy-eight

years, and one thing I've learned is that surprises happen when you least expect them. You just have to stay open to them and enjoy them when they happen."

The old man stopped talking, closing his eyes in reflection. I looked at him and thought about what he had said, realizing that it was profound in some way but not knowing how. After a little while, the old man reopened his eyes and turned to me, asking, "Where's your ma right now, Jake?"

"She has to work."

"And your dad?"

"I don't know where he is."

"Ah, I see. So you come here to pass the day away, killing time already. Nah, I shouldn't say killing time. A kid your age has fun doing everything. It's a gift, I tell you. Let me tell you, Jake, when you get to be my age, you have to decide whether you spend your days having a good time or killing time. I have to make that decision every morning, whether I'll have a fun day or spend it killing time."

"What did you decide to do this morning?"

"Kill time. But, it's looking like I might have a change in plans. I can't tell you how important it is to have a good day. You're still young, so I bet that there are many days that you remember as good days. Well, let me warn you that the older you get, the faster those days melt away. Before you know it, your body is old, and you realize that thirty years have gone by so fast that you still look into the mirror expecting to see the sharpness of a twenty-five year old looking back. But your eyes dull with time, and when you think back about the days that were simply good, you can't think of all that many.



But I shouldn't go on, worrying a young kid like you. You got plenty of time to enjoy before age slows you down."

"Well, how do you spend the days when you decide to kill time?"

"Usually, I don't even remember. The day just gets all smashed up into a few minutes of memory. Some just disappear altogether."

I asked the next question with the pardon that only a child's bluntness warrants.

"Don't you have kids or grandkids to spend time with?"

The old man chuckled, his teeth peeking through his lips. "No, Jake. I don't really have anybody but myself. But I keep myself good enough company, so I'm not complaining. The only thing that gets me down is knowing that when I leave this world, nobody is going to notice. Well, that's not true. For a couple of weeks my butcher will wonder where I've been going to get my meat. The checkout lady over at the grocery store will wonder why I haven't come in to shamelessly flirt with her while she rings up my purchase. But after awhile, they will forget about me. I'll be erased from the story that time creates. Gee, listen to me, would you? I'm getting too sentimental in my old age. Anyways, any company for me is good company."

"I guess I know what you mean."

"Well, I hope you don't. You know something though, kid? This playground has been around for a long time. I used to play here when I was your age. Not too many things in this town have been around for so long. Of course, when I played here, all of this plastic and metal stuff they have here now for the kids to play on wasn't here. Everything was wood. Wooden seesaw, wooden swing set, an old tire swing, all that kind of stuff. All of it is gone now, except for that old log cabin. Now that beauty was

here seventy years ago, same spot and all. That little house has help up all this time, a little worse for the wear now, but still in good shape.”

“I love that cabin! This morning I protected it from pirate invasion! It was great!”

“Ah, really? And what did you use to keep those nasty pirates away? That stick there?”

“Yes sir!”

“See, I knew that was a good stick.”

I would have told the old man all about my morning warfare if something hadn't have caught my eye at that moment. I saw speedy roll by on the street right in front of me, a kid named Gary Wyatt riding on top. I shouted out, “Hey, that's my bike” and ran out into the street, panting to catch up to Gary as he pedaled away.

A note concerning Gary Wyatt: he was a bad kid. Every town has at least one kid who is known for trouble. Our town had thirteen-year-old Gary Wyatt, the most feared individual at school. I had received my fair share of shoves, punches, and insults from Gary simply because I was smaller and younger than him. In short, he was the last person I wanted to see on top of Speedy; I had rather have seen Satan himself atop it.

I ran after Gary, shouting for him to stop. Gary ignored me and was getting further and further away, so I knew I had to get his attention. I thought of the first bad thing I could say to him and shouted, “Too bad your brain's not as quick as you are on that bike, Gary!”

I heard the squeal of Speedy's handbrakes as Gary stopped in the road. He wheeled around to face me, forty yards in front of me. I could see the anger in his eyes even at that distance.

"You want your bike, geek? Alright, I'll let you have it then." After Gary had finished his sentence, he began pedaling towards me, strait at me, to be honest. He was going to run me over with my own bike. I realized that I still had my stick clutched in my hand; I had not dropped it before I ran after Speedy. I waited until Gary was almost on top of me and shifted as quickly as I could to the left, avoiding the Bike just barely. As I moved, I swung my stick as hard as I could at Gary's leg, connecting with it at the side of his kneecap. I've always wished I could have seen myself make this move because I bet it was one of the most graceful moments in my otherwise clumsy physical life. Gary yelled in pain. I heard a crack as my stick snapped in two, and Gary lost control of speedy, tilting too far to one side. Gary fell to the ground, skidding across the pavement a short distance.

I knew that Gary would pummel me as soon as he got to his feet, and I didn't have my sidearm anymore. I didn't wait for him to get up, but grabbed Speedy and pedaled as fast as I could back to the park. The old man was still at the park bench, a grin stretched across his face. He had been able to view the whole incident from his seat, and he greeted me with, "Good shot, Jake!"

"Thanks."

"You know, you better make yourself scarce, because that bully will probably come looking for you now. I wouldn't be too scared of him, though. Fear will set in with

him tonight when his leg really starts hurting, and I doubt he'll give you too much trouble after that. He won't want to get a thwack like you gave him."

"Well, what do I do?"

"Go hide in the cabin, and take your bike in with you. I'll keep watch." I began walking Speedy over to the cabin when I heard the old man call. "Hey, Jake. It's just occurred to me that you are now without a stick. Check in the log cabin at the bottom right corner of the back wall. You'll see a piece of wood nailed in that's got an "X" carved on it. Use a rock to break the piece of wood; it shouldn't be too hard. I left something there when I was young that you may have a use for."

I answered him "O.K.," and I grabbed a good-sized rock before running into the cabin, pushing Speedy in with me. I crouched in the corner waiting for the old man to give me the clear. After about ten minutes, I heard the old man call, "O.K., the coast is all clear. You can come out. I gotta be going, kid, but don't forget what I told you about the cabin. Thank you, kid. This will be a day I will remember as good instead of killing time."

I came out of the cabin, seeing that the old man was already walking away. I called out to him, "Thanks!" to which he just raised a hand, not turning around. I watched the old man walk down the length of the street, eventually disappearing around a corner. I stood a moment longer and then remembered the secret within the cabin. I rushed inside and located the panel of wood the old man had described, complete with the "X." I raised the rock high in one hand and brought it down against the wood, dust flying as the wood gave way and my hand went through the panel.

\* \* \* \* \*

I never saw the old man again, but I have often thought about him. I didn't even know his name, but he had allowed me to live a real adventure, an adventure that I didn't have to imagine. And what was in the secret panel? I found a revolver wrapped in a cloth, the firing pin filed down to prevent lethal use of the weapon. Years later, a friend of mine who is a history buff told me that the revolver is the kind given to majors during the Civil War. I guess that the old man received the gun from his father, but I can only guess. I still have it in a drawer, and I occasionally oil and polish it to keep it looking nice for my son. I had countless good times playing with my new sidearm, and I continued to keep the pirates at bay with the imaginary bullets fired from the revolver. I wish I could tell the old man that he won't be forgotten, that I continue to remember him and appreciate the time we spent together. That's why I tell the story, so others will continue to think about the old man. I won't let him be forgotten.

by Jay Stringfield

Miss Mayflower is a beautiful woman.

How old is she? No one knows. She says that a real lady never tells her age.

Every day, she goes to the big hotel for tea. She carefully chooses the right outfit.

Today it's a peacock-blue dress with matching shoes and hat, silver necklace and earrings, white stockings, and white gloves. They match her peacock-blue eyes and silver hair and perfect white white skin.

A neighbor asked her, "Miss Mayflower, what is your secret? How can we women look lovely and stay lovely like you?"

Miss Mayflower said, "To be beautiful, look only at beauty -- never at ugliness.

For example, when you ride the subway, be careful to look only at attractive people.

Maybe in summer, here's a pregnant girl standing in the aisle. She is nursing one baby and leading another, holding a diaper bag, dropping a toy or bottle on the floor. Often a young mother's hair and clothes are messy. So, I turn my eyes away.

Maybe in winter, there's a veteran riding the train to stay warm. He was drinking alcohol, and can't sit up. He is talking in a confused way about the war. I'll move away from him.

At the hospital station, pale people get on with wheelchairs or oxygen tanks. It's bad to let them ride with us; we healthy people could catch a disease! So I will go to some other car in the train. Look only at attractive people! That is the secret of eternal beauty."

Nurse Mila is a beautiful woman.

How old is she? She says that she is thirty. But she looks a little tired and pale.

Every day she goes to the big hospital for work. She carefully chooses the right outfit.

Today and every day it's a white coat, a stethoscope, rubber gloves, and a mask.

A patient asked her, "In America, where are the real ladies? In my country, every woman dresses up and applies makeup before leaving the house. To show respect for ourselves as women, we show that first we are ladies. American women do not dress up. Their appearance seems disrespectful to themselves, and disrespectful to me. It's depressing."

"You know," I said to the patient, "The documentary 'Miss Sarajevo' shows a beauty contest during wartime. People were in terrible danger, but the women took one day as a holiday just to dress up. It was important to their morale."

"Yes!" said the patient. "Exactly. Even in wartime, a woman is first a lady."

Nurse Mila was busy cleaning this patient's badly infected foot. She said "I am from Sarajevo. Some doctors and nurses there saw a bombing; they ran to help, they stayed, they opened a kind of clinic. One doctor said to me "Hurry up! Help me!" That was the beginning of my nursing school. From then on, I cleaned wounded people all day every day. I was 15. I missed the beauty contest. We all did. We never even thought about it."

"How terrible!" the patient said. "A young girl is sensitive. She must not be exposed to such terrible sights."

Nurse Mila bandaged the patient's poor foot, removed her gloves, washed her hands, helped the patient to stand up, and gave her a hug and a smile. "But in all my life, I have never seen an ugly person. When I look at any human being, all I can see is beauty."

What is the true secret of eternal beauty?

What do *you* think?