

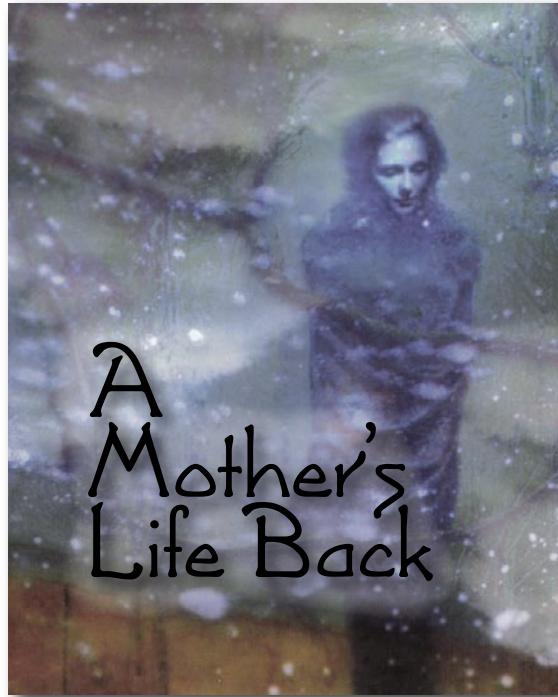
Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." And He came up

and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt.

And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

(Luke 7:11-15)



A Mother's Life Back

SHE FACED A LIFE OF DESTITUTION ON THE STREETS. She had never asked for much, and had been content with the little she had, but now even that had been taken away. Her town was just a day's walk from Nazareth, lying up against the Hill of Moreh, which separated it from the village of Shunem, where the ancient prophet Elisha had given back life to a woman's son. But now, as she plodded wearily through the streets behind the coffin of her only son, the widow knew that this time there would be no prophet to raise her child from the dead.

She glanced up, wincing from the brilliant Galilean sun, to look again upon the rows of tombs and caves carved out of the hillside that overlooked her city. And she felt their gape-toothed grin laughing at her, mocking her for expecting a life without so much pain and death. First her husband, and now her only son, and she was left alone, to fend for herself. If life before had been miserable, it would now quickly become desperate. Without her son, she would be consigned to a life in the streets. The procession continued, slow and heavy, toward the city gate, and the tomb outside the walls where her son would be buried.

The man blended in so well with the rest of the people milling about the gate that she didn't notice Him at first. She only made mental note that there appeared to be an extraordinary number of people in the city today—then was swallowed back inside her grief. But then she felt His voice carry over the funereal din. She heard it, yes, but more than that, she felt the warm peace of His voice envelop her, cushioning her from the pain and despair of the moment.

"Don't cry," she heard Him say. How many times had she heard others say those words—those meaningless, trite words of artificial sympathy muttered in her presence by friends and neighbors unsettled by her grief. But this voice was different. This time the words carried to

within His arms

A SERIES

her were not only sincere, but seemed to hold the power to actually remove any reason for the tears. They were spoken by one who was not powerless against the grave.

Then she saw Him, and in His face she recognized one who was actually *participating* in her grief—not expressing the hopeless sorrow mirrored by her closest friends, for He had already dismissed that cause, but expressing instead a deep compassion for her and what she was being made to experience.

“Don’t cry,” He repeated, then suddenly turned away from her, toward the litter that bore her son. Astonished that someone would risk ritual defilement by touching that which touched a dead body, the bearers stopped in their tracks. The stranger reached out and touched the coffin, gently, yet with a quiet assurance.

A hush fell over the crowd. It happened so quickly, the widow could only stare, astonished. With a steady voice, as if He were only waking someone from a nap, the gentleman said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”

Some in the crowd tittered nervously, amused by the brash temerity of this stranger. Others frowned, and muttered their displeasure that this solemn occasion had been made even more painful by the antics of a street magician. But all were silenced when the corpse raised up by itself and began to speak. His mother, feeling herself slipping into a dream, her sorrow meeting with stunned disbelief, swooned, and her friends eased her down to the ground.

But then the stranger who had lovingly told her not to cry was kneeling beside her, shading her from the intense sunlight. Next to Him—standing straight, blinking in the brilliance of the day—was the son she had thought was forever gone from her life. As she looked up and finally understood that it was true, her grief suddenly vanished, to be replaced by overwhelming relief and joy. “Woman,” the man said, “here is your son.” And He was gone.

*Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth and song;
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?*

*Does Jesus care when my way is dark
With a nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,
Does He care enough to be near?*

*O yes, He cares! I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.*

(Frank E. Graeff)



Within Reach

There are a number of ways that a family of cats is like a family of children, and one way is that they understand and take advantage of the different behaviors of the human male and female. When the members of our family want to play, they come to me, but when they want to cuddle, they go to Linda. Similarly, when they’ve misbehaved, and Linda yells at them to stop, she is mostly ignored. But when my voice rises to the occasion, they know I mean business—and they obey (usually).

When I was a kid I always knew that my dad loved me, but when I wanted affection, I went to my mom. Dad earned the money in the family, and he taught me many practical things that I would use for the rest of my life. And, compared to a lot of men, Dad was affectionate, but, well, he wasn’t Mom.

I know that God the Father loves me; His love for me is sufficiently extravagant for Him to have sacrificed His own Son for my benefit. I know His love is real, and that it is timeless, and constant.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!
For He has satisfied the thirsty soul,
And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

(Psalm 107:8-9)

I know my heavenly Father loves me—but He is not Jesus. God the Father’s love for me may be just as real, but He is far distant. Jesus is God’s love come down to my level; Jesus is God’s love in the flesh, and as such, it seems more real, more tangible.

God the Father is the one I bow to. I know His ankles well, but cannot describe the rest of Him, because I am always knelt at His feet with my face to the ground—not in trembling fear, but out of respect for His utter holiness.

But my Lord Jesus I can describe to a tee, because He has dwelt for awhile beyond the level of spirit to acquaint Himself with my weaknesses.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

(Hebrews 4:15)

When I am scanning the empty road for a friendly face; when I am feeling tired and alone in a crowd of strangers; when I feel like giving up, and can’t think of anyone else who can help—when I need consolation, I am looking for Jesus. Jesus is just as holy, just as righteous as the Father, but He is within reach.