



THE

RUNT

**A FABLE OF
GIANT INNER HEALING**

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1 *The Canyon*

Runty lived alone in a narrow, non-descript, canyon. He always had, as long as he could remember. The canyon walls were very high, at least twenty feet. But they might as well have been a million; there was no way to climb out. He was way too short. He was trapped.

The canyon was narrow, not quite as wide as Runty was tall. It was really more of a crevasse in the earth than a canyon, what they call a slot canyon. A crack restraining his life to its bland, boring, dirt walls and floor.



Sometimes it was claustrophobic. Sometimes he could feel the walls closing in on him, and he would panic. Sometimes he just had to get out! Sometimes he couldn't take it anymore! He'd run head long until he got as much speed as he could, and then jump with all he was worth up the walls—only to crash into the unforgiving canyon wall, scraping and tearing his skin on the way back down.

Sometimes he'd claw at the walls, desperately trying to climb out. But he'd just end up with bloody fingers, tired and dirty, and in the same spot on the canyon floor as when he started. What was the point? He'd tried and failed so many times. It was no longer worth the disappointment.

Over time, Runty slowly came to the realization that he was trapped. The canyon was in charge, and he was its victim. He resigned to canyon life.

It was a twisty path to who-knows-where. It often turned so you could only see ten to twenty-five feet ahead at a time. The canyon completely controlled his path. He was trapped, what else could he do? All he could do was follow it forward. He didn't dare go back. The Eyes were back there.



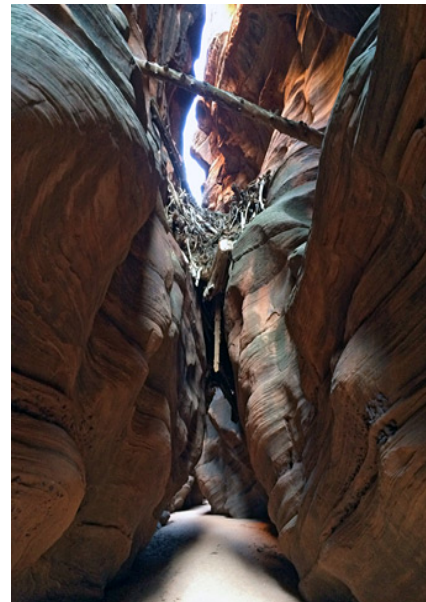
The canyon provided for all of Runty's needs. It wasn't much of a life, but it was a life. He found puddles of water, just often enough to keep from dying of thirst. He was always happy to quench his parched lips and tongue in the muddy water when he found it. The canyon even had an occasional weed he could eat. Sometimes he'd catch a lizard, which was a real treat. It seemed to him in those moments that the canyon wasn't so bad.

Runty was very thin. He felt weak, hungry, thirsty, and sick most of the time. But after the long years, he was used to it. To Runty, it was normal.

There were no colors in Runty's canyon. His day-world was dirt brown. Everything was the same color dirt. The high canyon walls prevented any direct sunlight, except for about an hour a day around high noon, when the sun was directly above, hottest and most miserable. Runty hated the sun. The hot noonday sun was the only sun he knew. There was no protection or shade in the canyon. His skin burned and his puddles evaporated.

Runty's night-world was pitch black, so black you could feel the darkness. The high canyon walls blocked any moonlight or starlight. The only light was from the Eyes behind him. Their presence was what kept him moving forward through the canyon, going as far as he could each day, to get as far away from them as possible. He couldn't always see them, but he could always feel them, just around the corner to the rear.

Sometimes the Eyes would sneak up in his sleep and nip on his feet, just enough to wake him up, and then they fled, always to the rear. Runty never slept well. He dosed in and out, trying to stay as awake as he could. They would never come within reach when he was awake. And he didn't understand how they could nibble on his feet while their eyes were out of reach. He thought they must have very funny shaped heads.



Runty almost never walked upright. He mostly half-crawled, half-scrampered-and-scurried through the canyon. All the good stuff was along the ground anyway. Puddles, weeds, the occasionally lizard, small rocks to throw at the Eyes at night, large rocks for pillows. And then when he needed to sleep, he was closer to the ground and didn't have to fall. What a deal! He had a system for living in the canyon. After all this time, he was pretty good at it, if he did say so himself.

This was Runty's life in the canyon. The hot days were tortuously hard and boring. The cold nights were filled with the tortuous unknown. But he kept going forward. Living in tortuous pain was normal. Didn't everyone?

Runty had a good attitude. He was sure there were worse places to be trapped. When there were storms up on the plain, up there outside the canyon, the closeness of the canyon walls gave Runty comfort and security. He felt safe.



On one level, Runty hated and despised the canyon. He knew it prevented him from living a real life up on the plain like everyone else. But on another level, he loved the canyon. It was familiar and predictable, always the same. It supplied all his needs and comforted him during the storms. He didn't know how he could live without it, although he longed to be free of it someday. Someday.

Runty was very positive. He kept his chin up. He could do it. He'd find the way out someday, if he kept moving forward, everyone said so. Someday. But not today. Today was about canyon life.

He was trapped, but there were worse traps. He was a prisoner, but there were worse prisons. He was a victim, but there were worse things that could happen. And after all, there was really no way out, so why not make the best of it?

2 *The Tall Ones*

Runty lived in a community. Oh, he lived alone in the canyon, totally alone in the canyon. Yes, it was a private canyon. No one else understood. No one else really cared. He was sure about that.

But the canyon ran through a community. There were people living up on the plain, doing what people do who aren't trapped in a canyon. Runty wouldn't know.

He called them the Tall Ones. They were taller than him, everybody was.

They would look down on him, way down in the canyon. Everyone looked down on Runty. He could see part of their heads or part of their faces peek over the top of the canyon wall.

Sometimes he could hear them laughing up there, doing what tall people did who weren't trapped in a canyon. Runty wouldn't know. It sounded like they were having a good time, though. Good for them, Runty thought. He had a lizard to catch.

Sometimes the Tall Ones would call to him. "Hey, Runt!"

"What? I'm down here," he'd answer, as if they didn't know.

"What are you doing down in that canyon?" a Tall One would ask, sounding seriously concerned.

"Catching a lizard. Want one?" Runty was always generous.

"You runt, get out of that filthy canyon!" another Tall One would call down. "Aren't you tired of eating lizards?"

"Apparently not," Runty would bark back, offended at them insulting his canyon. "Want one?" Runty enjoyed teasing them. He knew their answer before they said it.

"Oh, gross!" they'd cry out in unison.





“You little runt, stop eating lizards!” another Tall One would inevitably shout down in anger.

“Why?” Runty always asked, as if he didn’t know.

“Because they’re gross! They’re bad for you!” came the same condescending reply, again today. Same conversation as yesterday.

“Have you ever had one?” Runty would ask.

“No, of course not! We don’t eat lizards!” wafted down the same self-righteous reply he’d heard so many times before.

“Then you wouldn’t know, would you?” Runty always got the last word, and he laughed as they shook their heads and walked away.

He always watched them walk away, because they seemed to him to walk so funny. They never just moved straight in the direction they were going, like he did when he walked. Their heads would always bob and sway sideways first, and then move forward or back. He could only see their heads, so he couldn’t really see what was going on up there, but he always wondered about it, for a brief moment at least. Maybe that’s just how tall people walked. Runty wouldn’t know. Oh well. Now where was that lizard?

“Runty,” came a familiar, sad voice from above, filled with pity. The Sandwich Lady. He looked up to see a woman’s face, tears in her eyes, looking down at him. “Here’s a sandwich and some fresh water.” She tossed down a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in a baggie, and then a 17-oz. water bottle. He happily caught both.

“Thank you,” he called up. “God bless you.” Her sandwiches were always better than lizards, but he’d never admit it out loud.

“You’re welcome, Runty.” Her head bobbed and swayed as she sadly walked away.

He heard another Tall One’s voice from above, but couldn’t see the speaker. It was gruff and raspy. “Oh, that’s just great! Now he’ll never get out of that canyon! Why should he, when you keep throwing him sandwiches?”

“Have some compassion, will you? His life’s hard enough down there!” the Sandwich Lady shot back.

“It’s not compassion to enable someone...” their argument trailed off as they walked away. Runty didn’t care. He went back to looking for the lizard that got away as he ate his sandwich.



That was Runty's relationship with the Tall Ones in a nutshell. They either treated him with scorn or pity. He hated both, but he tolerated pity if it meant getting a sandwich.

They never smiled at Runty. The scornful ones would frown at him and shake their heads, shouting down all sorts of advice for getting out of the canyon, when they paid attention to him at all. The pitiful ones would cry over him and throw down a sandwich, or some water, or new shoes. Maybe a blanket which he always lost after one night. (Who needed a blanket during the hot day anyway?) But no one would ever smile with him, or even at him.

Except for Jumper. Only Jumper would smile, but Runty was sure it was only to mock him.

3 Jumper

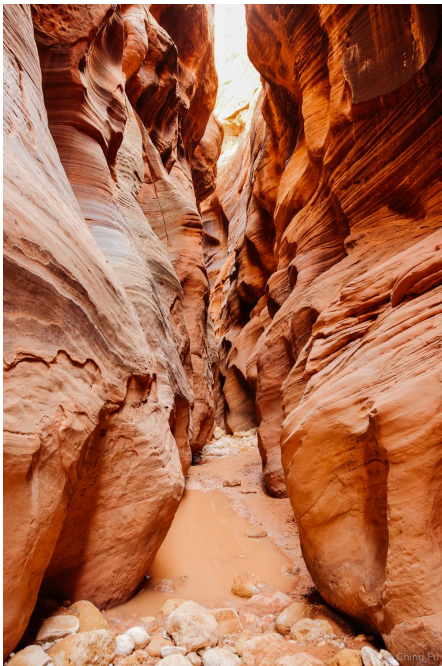
Runty hated Jumper most of all. At least that's what everyone called him; Runty wasn't sure of his real name.

Jumper would actually enter Runty's canyon, of all the nerve. It was very disruptive when you were trying to catch a lizard, let alone rude. Runty never saw how Jumper entered—he would annoyingly just be there. And Runty never saw how he left—Jumper would annoyingly just be gone. Runty could only assume that somehow Jumper could jump into and out of his canyon at will, like the canyon had no power over him. Runty thought Jumper was very mean to never take him along when he jumped out.

Jumper never fit into the unspoken arrangement Runty had with the other Tall Ones. You know the arrangement—either pity or scorn, but neither expecting Runty to ever really get out of the canyon, and Runty never really expecting to either. Runty and the Tall Ones at least agreed on that.

But Jumper was disruptive. He threatened to ruin the whole arrangement, overturn the whole apple cart. He always talked as if truly getting out of the canyon was actually possible. His presence always made Runty very uncomfortable, and Runty was always happy when he left.

But the worst thing about Jumper, the very worst thing about Jumper, was he never called Runty “Runty,” or even “runt.” And that infuriated Runty. Jumper mocked Runty with a much worse name, a name that reminded Runty of everything he was not.



One hot afternoon while Runty was having a particularly frustrating time down on all fours not catching lizards, and fuming about how much he hated Jumper's mocking, he heard the familiar, unwelcome voice.

“Hey, Tall One, how are you today?” No pity or scorn, just Jumper's usual matter-of-fact, smiling tone. Runty would've mistaken it for friendly if he didn't know better.

“For the last time, stop calling me ‘Tall One,’ Jumper! My name's ‘Runty’! Or even just ‘Runt’ if two syllables are too difficult for you!” *Can't this idiot get that through his head?* How many times did they have to have this conversation?

“No it’s not,” Jumper laughed. “You just think that because that’s what everyone calls you.” And there was the danger. Jumper’s laugh was infectious. It dripped of hope. And that was the one thing Runty could not tolerate in his canyon. Runty had to keep tight control of himself.

“Stop mocking me!” Runty shouted back. “I’m a runt, ok? You want me to admit it? Fine! I’m short! I’m the runt of the litter, always last! I live in a canyon!”

“I’ve never mocked you, Tall One,” Jumper said calmly, “although I know you think I have. Being short’s not the problem, although you’re not short. Living in the canyon’s the problem. There’s a way out if you want it.”

There was no scorn in Jumper’s voice. No pity either. He said it just like he was talking about the weather. And he never called down to Runty. He always knelt or did whatever he had to do to get down on Runty’s level, which was not easy because Runty never stood. He was always laying down or crawling or bear-walking or something. Jumper always talked straight across to Runty.

“Look, just shut up, ok?” Runty changed the subject back to the safer subject of his name. “If you won’t call me ‘Runty,’ then just don’t call me anything at all!”

“Ok, fair enough,” said Jumper.

Fair enough? That’s it? No argument? What was with this guy? Runty could never figure Jumper out. If Runty didn’t know better, he’d mistake Jumper for being respectful. Runty had to remind himself that no one will ever respect him. He was a runt and he lived in a canyon.

Still, if Jumper could pretend to be respectful, Runty could pretend to be polite. It might be nice to have some company, even Jumper. “Wanna catch a lizard?”

“No,” Jumper laughed, “but I’d love to do something else with you. Sand tic-tac-toe?”

“Sure,” said Runty.

They played tic-tac-toe in the sand for hours. Runty thought it would be fun to draw a really big board, a 9x9. They did and it was fun. Then they did a 12x12. That got a little crazy, and they were both laughing so hard they cried.

While they were playing, out of the blue, Runty asked Jumper, “Tell me about that way out you were talking about.”

“It’s right there.” Jumper pointed to the canyon wall. Runty saw a crack in the wall he’d not noticed before. It was very narrow, Runty would have to turn side-ways to get through it. And it was blocked by a large boulder.

Runty stated the obvious. “It’s blocked by a large boulder.”

So did Jumper. "Climb over it."

"I can't. I'm short."

"Yes you can, and no you're not."

"Jumper, don't be stupid, it's taller than I am." Not this conversation again.

"But not taller than your reach. Go over to it, stand up to your full height, and stretch. Reach up and pull yourself up and over. C'mon, I'll give you a boost to get you started."

Runty was skeptical. "And then what? Another boulder?"

Jumper confirmed his fears. "Probably. But you can climb over that one, too."

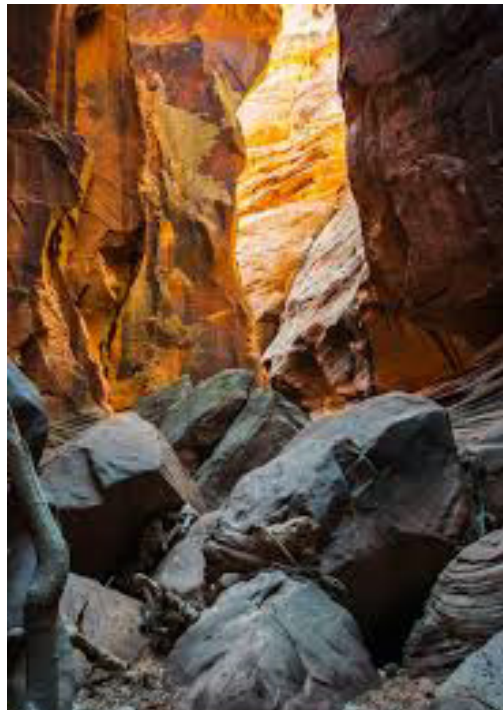
"And then what, Jumper?" asked Runty. "I'd have climbed over two huge boulders, and still be down in this canyon. But why do you always point to these stupid side cracks, anyway? They're completely at odds with the canyon's main path."

"Yes, I know," replied Jumper. "That's why it's the way out. It's a much more difficult path than the canyon's main path forward, but it winds upward. Eventually you'll be out."

"Jumper, I can see up into that crack, there's no handholds up there, I'll just fall and be trapped again!" Runty had enough of Jumper for one afternoon.

"There are handholds. And footholds, too. You just can't see them until you get closer, until you need them," Jumper answered. "You won't be in there alone, Tall One. God will be with you and light up the footholds and handholds when you need them. Trust him. That's his crack you'd be following, after all. He put it here to get you out of this canyon."

"Oh, God again!" Runty had really had it now. He especially hated this conversation, and somehow with Jumper, it always ended up here. "I don't need God. I'm fine ok? I got this. I can climb out of this canyon anytime I want, anywhere I want! I don't need his difficult cracks and boulders to climb over. I'm just fine. Besides, if you cared so much, why don't you just jump me out of here yourself?" Take that, Jumper!



“It doesn’t work that way,” Jumper answered. “If you want out, you have to hate the canyon and the lizards and the muddy puddles enough to finally trust God and follow his difficult side crack.”

“It doesn’t work that way,” Runty mocked back at Jumper. “I don’t need his side cracks, I don’t need him, and I don’t need you! I don’t need anybody! So just get lost, ok? Beat it! Get out of my canyon!”

And just like that Jumper was gone.

Runty thought Jumper was really cruel to tease him like this. Those side cracks were no way out. They couldn’t be. Runty could never climb over those boulders. And footholds and handholds that lit up when you needed them? Ridiculous! How stupid did Jumper think he was? If Jumper really cared about him, he’d help him catch a lizard. *Oh, there’s one...*



4 *The Ladder*

One day the Tall Ones decided to help Runty get out of his canyon. After much public debate, and many committee meetings, they put together a plan. It was simple enough. Why hadn't anybody thought of this before?

They built a ladder. A big, solid, wooden, extension ladder. Made out of heavy, solid oak. It was a beautiful ladder. The woodworking was quite ornate, and the names of families who had donated for the project were carved on each rung. It took many of them to carry it over to Runty's canyon.

"Hey, Runty, this is your lucky day!" they called down to him.

"Two sandwiches?" Runty called back up.

"No silly, we've made you a ladder! We'll throw it down to you and then you can just climb out of that canyon. Easy!" The Tall Ones were very excited.

Runty was excited, too. An easy way out of the canyon? Awesome! He actually dared to allow himself a little hope.

"Ok, everybody ready?" a Tall One shouted from up above. "We'll throw it down to him on three! One... two..."

"Stop! What are you doing? Are you out of your minds?!?" Runty heard Jumper's unwelcome voice shout at the Tall Ones up above. Why did he always have to disrupt everything?

"We're throwing him a ladder, so he can climb out! What does it look like we're doing?" responded the Tall Ones. They were very perturbed that Jumper had interrupted their count.

"Not like that! You can't just tumble it in, parallel with the canyon, it'll crush him!"

"Not if he catches it," came the Tall Ones obvious reply. Sometimes Jumper could be really stupid.





“How can he catch a heavy, wooden, oaken ladder that’s practically a piece of furniture? And how can he maneuver it by himself down there when it takes twenty of you to carry it up here?” Jumper could not believe his eyes. Were they really going to do this?

“You should’ve brought that up at the Committee meeting! It’s a little late now,” one of the Tall Ones scornfully chided Jumper.

“I don’t go to your committee meetings. I have canyons to jump in and out of,” Jumper made the mistake of defending himself.

“And who’s fault is that?” demanded another self-righteous Tall One, who happened to chair the Committee.

“You know, Jumper’s never been very involved in his own community,” said one very serious looking Tall One to another.

“Look, just back up a minute, alright?” Jumper pleaded with the agitated crowd. “God has given him cracks to follow to get out, but he’s got to want it himself. You can’t rescue him and do it for him. He doesn’t hate the canyon enough yet.”

“It always comes back to God with you, doesn’t it, Jumper? Well, just maybe there’s another way to do things,” said one of the Tall Ones. “Did you ever think of that?”

“These religious nuts are part of the problem,” said one very smart looking Tall One to another.

Runty was amused listening to this, that the Tall Ones found Jumper’s one-track mind as annoying as he did.

“Three!” yelled the Tall One who’s count Jumper had rudely interrupted. And they all heaved the heavy ladder into the canyon. Not feet first, but parallel with the canyon’s path, like Jumper was afraid of. “Catch it, Runty!”

Runty tried to catch it. He was thrilled that someone was finally giving him some help he

could use. He looked forward to climbing up and spitting in Jumper's face. Side cracks, indeed!

When the ladder was about five feet above his head, he realized his problem. But it was too late. He tried to catch it, but it was far too heavy. Jumper was right, but he would never admit. It smashed him to the ground. He was pinned on his back under its crushing weight, unable to move. He just looked up between the rungs at the expectant faces.

"Donated by the Hoos-It family," he read on the rung facing him, pinning his chest to the ground.

"Oh, look Daddy!" cried little girl Hoos-It. "He's on our rung!"

"Let's just hope he's smart enough to use it," lectured Daddy Hoos-It.

The other Tall Ones began to call down to Runty.

"Good catch, Runty!" They sincerely meant it.

"Way to go, Runty!"

"Ok, Runty, now just push it up! You can do it!"

Runty tried to bench-press the ladder on top of him, but it wasn't moving. He was pinned under the middle of the ladder and had no leverage to lift anything, even if he had the strength, which, on a diet of weeds and lizards, he didn't.

"Ok, now, c'mon, Runty," the Tall Ones continued to encourage him. "We've done our part, now you do yours."

"You can do it, Runty!"

"C'mon, Runty, push! You can do it!"

"Runty, all you've got to do is raise the ladder along the canyon wall."

But Runty couldn't move. All he could do was lie there under the enormous weight of the oaken extension ladder.

"Runty, you've got to do your part." The Tall Ones were starting to get frustrated now.

"If the runt doesn't want to help himself, there's nothing more we can do."

"C'mon, Runty! Just one good push!"

Their heads began to bob and sway as they slowly began to walk away.

"Runty, c'mon now, don't let us down!"

"Look at all we've done for you, you little runt! It took us months to make that ladder! You could at least try."

"The runt has to want to, we can't do it for him."

"The sad thing is it would've worked."

"I told you not to throw good money down that canyon," lectured Mother Hoos-it.

"It's his own fault he's stuck down there."

"He'll never get out now."

The last face to disappear was the tearful Sandwich Lady. A baggie with a sandwich bounded down the canyon wall and bounced off Runty's forehead before landing on the ground beside his head.



"Thanks a lot," Runty mumbled to himself. He couldn't even move, let alone reach that stupid sandwich an inch from his head. He had bigger problems than hunger right now. He couldn't even move.

Then, miraculously and unexpectedly, the ladder moved up and off his chest, just an inch.

He heard Jumper's very strained voice. "Tall One, c'mon, crawl! Crawl out from under it. Hurry up!"

Somehow Jumper, on all fours, had got his back under the end of the ladder, pushing it up just enough to give Runty a chance to crawl out. Jumper was red-faced from the strain; he couldn't hold it for long. "C'mon, Tall One, hurry up! Get out of there!"

Runty crawled out quickly and Jumper let the ladder crash back on the canyon floor, shattering into a million pieces.

"Are you alright, Tall One?" Jumper asked.

"Yes, and stop calling me Tall One," Runty answered. They both plopped down against opposite sides of the canyon, panting heavily.

"By the way, God put a crack right behind you if you want it," Jumper pointed. It was blocked by the usual boulder, of course.

"No thanks," replied Runty without even looking. "I think I've had enough 'help,'" he made finger quotes, "for one day."

They were both exhausted. They said no more, but just sat against opposite canyon walls looking at each other, being with one another, until they fell asleep. In the morning, Jumper was gone.

5 *The Swamp*

Runty saw the Tall Ones far less frequently now, and that was fine with him. They were both disgusted and disappointed with each other. Runty focused on keeping ahead of the Eyes at night, by following the canyon path and going wherever it was leading him as far as he could each day.

Jumper still made the same occasional appearances he always did, whenever a side crack was provided by “God,” whoever that was. Runty didn’t know. God seemed very distant these days.



The muddy puddles gradually became more and more frequent now. Runty never stopped to think about what that might mean, but he was delighted. More water and more lizards.

The more canyon water Runty drank, and the less he drank of the bottled water the Sandwich Lady dropped to him, the sicker he looked. Jumper was getting concerned, but he withheld saying anything to Runty because he didn’t think Runty would receive it. He was right.

Jumper was waiting (and praying) for the right time, when Runty was ripe to hear. But Runty was more absorbed in the canyon now than he’d ever been.

Jumper thought he kept hearing God say, “He doesn’t hate it enough yet, but he will shortly.”

One day, as the puddles were getting big enough to splash in and it was getting harder and harder to find dry ground to walk around them, Runty saw a large lizard swim through a large puddle under a rock. He eagerly splashed into the puddle after it, lifted the rock, and reached to grab the lizard. Only it wasn’t a lizard; it was a snake. With cheeks. A poisonous snake. A water moccasin. It bit Runty on the hand, dumped a lot of venom into his bloodstream, then released and swam off.

Runty fell, shaking violently, into the water, against the canyon wall. The puddle was deep enough to cover most of his legs. He’d hated and he’d loved

the canyon, but he'd always somehow thought that the canyon was trying to kill him. Now, too late, he was sure of it.

His was shaking more violently now, and he knew he didn't have long.



“Oh God,” Runty prayed, “if you're real, if you're there, help me. I've changed my mind, I can't do this by myself! If you save me, I'll get out of this canyon at the next crack you give me.”

Instantly Jumper was there, dragging Runty out of the puddle. He took out a small razor-blade and slit Runty's hand across the fang marks. Then he sucked the poison out and spat it away, bit by bit.

Runty's shaking had mostly stopped, but he was still very weak. Jumper forced as much fresh bottled water down him as he would drink.

“Tall One, you've got to get out of this canyon or it's going to kill you,” Jumper pleaded. He wasn't sure this was the right time, but there might not be another time.

Runty was starting to feel more like himself. “No, I'm alright now, I got this,” Runty said as he deliberately forgot about his promise to God. “Look there's a lot more water now, and now that I know there are snakes, I'll just stay away from them. Easy. The canyon's providing for me. Look, there's even starting to be some vegetation growing!”

Jumper couldn't believe his ears. “Tall One, the canyon's not providing for you, it's trying to kill you! It's a trap! Can't you see that? Look at the 'vegetation' as you call it. It's moss, it's lichen, this is stagnant water. Your

canyon has lead you into a swamp! This is just the beginnings of it. Why do you think the Eyes having been driving you here?"

"The Eyes have nothing to do with it!" shot back Runty.

"Don't you know what they are?" asked Jumper.

"I have a feeling you're going to tell me," mumbled Runty.

"They're alligators, Tall One!" revealed Jumper. "That's why they're driving you to the swamp, so you're in their environment and they can take you down. They're setting you up to be their next meal!"

Well, Runty thought, that would explain how they can nibble on my feet while their eyes are out of reach. He wasn't convinced Jumper was telling the truth, but it at least made sense. And he wasn't happy about that. He couldn't afford to start believing Jumper now just when things were looking up in the canyon.

"Get lost, Jumper, I'm fine, I got this. I can live in this canyon and be just fine," Runty pretended, trying to convince himself more than Jumper.

"You're not fine, Tall One! You almost died today!" shouted Jumper.

"Whatever. See you later, Jumper." Runty turned to scamper down the canyon, and then turned back. "And stop calling me 'Tall One.'"

But Runty wasn't fine. He half scampered, half bear-walked, half stumbled down the canyon into the deeper puddles. He stumbled into a hole where the puddle was suddenly waist-deep. He fell forward into the water, where a disturbed water moccasin bit him on the foot. He started shaking again.



Jumper grabbed the snake and flicked it with a hard and fast wrist-snap against the canyon wall, killing it. "Get away from him, all of you!" Jumper shouted. Three more previously unseen water moccasins slithered out of Runty's puddle and away.

Jumper carried Runty to a shallower spot, slit the fang marks as before, sucked out and spat away the poison. This bite was on Runty's foot, furthest from his heart, and Jumper got to it right away. But it was the second bite, and Runty obviously hadn't fully recovered from the first one yet. And his generally sick condition, worse than usual from all the swamp water he'd been drinking, wasn't helping either.

Jumper sat and held him in the shallow, muddy puddle, the water covering their legs. Runty's back was to Jumper's front, and Jumper's back was to the

canyon wall. Runty's eyes were closed, and he was white as a ghost. He was still shaking, gently, with periodic tremors.

"Oh, God," prayed Jumper. "Save this one. Just save this one."

Runty started to vomit. Jumper took that as a good sign. At least it was metabolism. He leaned Runty over to make it easier. Runty threw up a lot of swamp water. Then Jumper dragged him out of the puddle back to dry land and made a fire. Dusk was getting on.

None of those alligators better even dare peek around that corner, thought Jumper, *I am not in the mood.*

After he had a fire going, he poured more fresh water into and over Runty. Runty sputtered and opened his eyes. "What happened?" he stammered.

"You almost died. Twice in one day," Jumper reminded him. "You're still not looking so good. I'm not sure you're out of the woods yet."

Runty didn't feel so good. He felt like death warmed over. He was going to deny it like he always did, but then suddenly decided that was pretty stupid. Why was he defending this stupid canyon that held him prisoner all his life and now was trying to kill him? That had restricted his life to a narrow winding path? That kept him sick most of the time, only to finally lead him to a swamp to get bitten by snakes and eaten by alligators?

But what choice did he have? He stayed in the canyon all these years because he had no hope of getting out. And because it drowned the pain. At first, at any rate. Then the canyon created its own pain that was much worse and that Runty could no longer ignore.

But what choice did he have? There was no way out. Unless...

"Jumper, tell me about these cracks of yours."

Meanwhile, Jumper was getting a download from God. And he didn't like it. This was the moment of truth for Runty.

"There's one right there, behind that boulder," pointed Jumper. "And Tall One, there's something else God wants you to know."

The fire popped and crackled while Jumper got up the nerve to share what God had told him, what he knew he must. And for once, Runty waited. This time, he really wanted to know.

"God has shown you today the canyon's true intent—it's trying to kill you, it always has been. God has revealed to you the alligators' strategy. They are in league with the canyon. Who do you think it was that first lured you in here? With the help of the canyon, they have been driving you to this point, to the swamp. This is the end, as they planned it.

"But it doesn't have to be. God loves you and has another plan for you, Tall One, and it starts tonight, if you're willing. There's a crack right behind you, and God will lead you out of this canyon if you have the heart to follow

it. It will be the hardest path you've followed yet in this canyon. But it will take you up and out.

"But it's the last crack, Tall One. The last one. You either escape through it tonight or you die in the swamp tonight. Either God's plan starts, or the alligator's plan finishes. Tonight. Your choice."

Then Jumper was quiet for a long time and just waited for Runty to speak. Runty remembered that Jumper was the only one who respected him enough to wait for him. Jumper never got impatient with him while he was trying to form his thoughts like the other Tall Ones always did. He just waited as long as it took.

"You've never talked down to me, Jumper," said Runty. "You go out of your way to get down on my level. And you've helped me, really helped me. Why?"

"To respect you. Because God loves you," Jumper responded. "Because you needed help. And because I love you."

"Why are you so different from the other Tall Ones?" Runty asked.

"They're doing the best they can, bound as they are," answered Jumper. "Very few of us are actually free."

Runty didn't understand that at all, so he went back to the problem at hand. "Will you come with me? Up that crack, I mean?" he asked.

"I'll give you a boost to get started, if you want it, although you don't need it. But no, I can't go with you. Then you'd be following me, and God will have you for no one but himself. But you won't be alone, Tall One, God will be with you," Jumper smiled, "lighting up the footholds and handholds right when you need them. And I'll be waiting for you at the top!"

Runty didn't like the idea of going up that crack alone, without Jumper. He didn't like it at all. But he hated the canyon. He loathed the canyon. He always had, and he wasn't hiding it anymore. There was no way he was staying here, whatever it took.

"Ok, one last question," said Runty, smiling. "Will you finally stop calling me 'Tall One'?"

"No," Jumper laughed, that infectious, joyous, peace-filling laugh of his. "Tall One."

Runty laughed. "Fine, here we go then," he said, and they both got up and headed toward the crack.

6 *The Crack and the Cross*



The crack was blocked by the usual boulder, and Runty looked at it in despair. “Stretch up to your full height and reach as high as you can,” encouraged Jumper.

“It’s too tall, I’ll never get over it,” observed Runty.

“Just try. I’ll give you a boost if you need it. What have you got to lose?”

Runty didn’t know how to stretch to his full height. His life in the canyon had always been pointed toward the ground. Trying now to focus on something upward felt very odd and disconcerting. But he tried. He raised himself against the boulder and put his hands up as far as they would go. To his surprise, he felt ridges he could pull himself up with. He felt Jumper give him a boost, and suddenly he was over. He plopped down on the other side, but only a foot or so below the height of the boulder. The path was much higher on this side of the boulder.

“Good job, Tall One,” called Jumper. “It’ll get easier the more you do it.”

“Aren’t you coming?” Runty pleaded with Jumper, already knowing the answer. “If I could get over it, you certainly can. And I’ll need your help to get over the next one.”

“You’ll have help, but not from me. God is with you, Tall One. You get to meet him on this journey. Just start talking to him and he’ll start talking back.

“If you encounter any more boulders, just do the same thing. Stretch and reach. Grab what you find and pull yourself over. God will light up the footholds and handholds as you need them. Trust him—that’s your primary task on this journey. Learn to trust God. I’ll meet you at the top.”

Runty didn’t understand that at all. A thought came into his mind that maybe he didn’t have to understand a truth to use it. Maybe the understanding came later. Ok then, he would see. Maybe it would work. He would try.

Sure enough, before long, there was another boulder. He heaved a heavy sigh of frustration and despair looking up at it. “There’s no way I can get over that,” he said out loud to no one in particular.

“Will you trust me?” answered someone in particular, in his thoughts. Runty knew it was God. He didn’t know how he knew, but he knew.

“It’s too big. I’m too short. There’s no handholds. There’s no footholds. It’s too dark. There could be a snake on the other side. And I’m too tired,” said Runty. He laid out what he thought was a very logical litany of reasons why this would never work.

God politely listened to them all, and then rudely ignored them all, simply repeating his original question, “Will you trust me?”

Runty realized he wasn’t getting anywhere with this conversation until he answered God with a yes or a no.

“Yes, fine,” Runty finally sighed. “But if it doesn’t work, it’s on you.” He felt God smile.

He went up to the boulder, reached and stretched, like Jumper taught him. He was amazed to find his arms going over the curve of the boulder’s top. He could easily pull himself over with that leverage, and he did. “Thank God,” he muttered out of habit under his breath, not even realizing he said it.

“You’re welcome,” came the reply in his thoughts.

This conversation, word for word, played itself out at least half-a-dozen more times before Runty starting seeing a pattern. Staring up at each boulder, he knew he could never possibly reach over it, but then he did every time.

Maybe there were some weird optical illusions, or maybe God was shrinking the boulders, or maybe something else was going on here that he

didn't understand. He just didn't know. He had no rational explanation for it. He just knew by experience that trusting God was working. It was harder, physically, mentally, and emotionally, than anything he'd ever done before. But it was working. Every time.

He started believing, even before he saw it, that God would, not just could, help him over the next boulder. He even made up a corny, little song about it that he started singing.

It's too big. You don't care.
I'm too short. You don't care.
No handholds. You don't care.
No footholds. You don't care.

It's too dark. You don't care.
Hidden snake. You don't care.
I'm too tired. You don't care.
But I trust you. You care and you're there.

Climbing over the boulders and getting higher and higher into the crack was giving him something he never experienced or felt before. He didn't know that it was called Faith. He just knew it felt really good. It felt substantive, which is something Runty had never felt in his life before.

After one of these boulders, God asked him a different question. Runty heard it as clearly in his mind as if someone had spoken it audibly. "Will you be mine?" The question took him off guard, was uncomfortably intimate, and all too real. Runty didn't answer at first. He pretended he didn't hear it, although he didn't think that would work to evade the question.

He was right, it didn't. The question came again. "Will you be mine?"

"What will it cost me?" asked Runty, mostly to buy time. He wanted to say yes but was afraid to at the same time.

"It will cost you everything. You will have to die to yourself, your way, what you want. But at the same time, you will gain everything, and discover who you really are. You're not who you think you are. When you learn who you really are, you'll be as excited about you as I am."

Runty had nothing to lose. He implicitly knew if he didn't say yes to God tonight, even if he made it out of the canyon, he'd fall back into it and die there in the end.

“Yes, Lord, I’m yours. Take me. Have your way. Forgive me for doing things my way for so long,” Runty’s heart responded before his brain could stop him. But his brain was glad he said it.

Although it still very dark in the crack he was following, a light started to grow and swell within him.

He suddenly realized he was experiencing the absence of something he’d lived with all his life. He’d never been without this thing, and thought living with it was normal. In fact, it occurred to him that he never even realized he had it because he’d never been without it. Until now. That thing was Fear.

He had just lived his first moment, breathed his first breath, without fear. Of any kind. It felt wonderful, and he began to laugh out loud. It wasn’t until he was out of fear’s grip that he realized just how much bondage he had been in.

He felt tremendous freedom instead. He put his hands out to his sides and began to spin around, laughing out loud, just loving on the God who set him free from shackles he’d worn for decades, in the instant he decided to let them go and grab onto God instead.

After a moment (or was it an eternity?) outside time with his Creator, he continued along the crack’s path. Around the next corner he saw a huge cross leaning against the canyon wall. It was lit from within itself, glowing with its own light. The top of the cross was at the top of the canyon. Finally! It was the way out. He heard God’s voice say, “Climb.” The first foothold and the first handhold lit up.

But they weren’t the only things that lit up. The Eyes were suddenly everywhere between Runty and the cross. “I have to go back,” they seemed to say. They talked to him in his thoughts, using his own voice. He realized in that moment they had been placing thoughts in his mind using his own voice for a long time. It made him really angry. But now, for the first time, he recognized the alligator voices for what they were.

“It’ll fall on me, just like the ladder did,” they said in his head, imitating his own voice, pretending to be him. “I’ll climb almost to the top, and it’ll fall on me. Look at how unstable it is.”

“Stop talking in my voice!” he shouted at them. They did.

“Do you want a lizard?” said another alligator, and threw him one, his favorite kind. As he looked at it, all the fear flooded back, more intense than he’d ever felt it before.

“I don’t want to go back,” he mumbled out loud to himself.

“You don’t have a choice. This isn’t for you. The canyon is who you are. It’s always protected you, been there for you. Go back now and we’ll call it even.”

The fear was rising up in Runty and he couldn’t put it down. The alligators were taking steps toward him now, snapping their jaws, their eyes glowing larger. He’d have to retreat back down the crack’s path to the canyon soon or get eaten right here. He was not prepared for this! Where was God’s voice? Why did God leave him alone? This truly was more than Runty could bear. Which is why he didn’t have to.

From above, just outside the canyon, a sound came. Just a poorly strummed, out-of-tune, guitar and a single voice not singing well. But it was worship to the Lord, to the King. Something in Runty leapt at the music. The alligators put their front feet over their ear holes, and vanished along with the fear they’d brought. The Eyes and the fear were gone.

There was just Runty and the cross. And God’s soft, gentle voice, “The choice is yours.” Runty ran to the cross and climbed it, following the lighted handholds and footholds. He reached the top, and the source of that poorly played music. Of course it was Jumper.

Runty was out of the canyon.



7 *The Plain*

“Thank you!” cried Runty to Jumper.

“Thank you! No one’s ever thanked me for my music before,” replied Jumper.

“Oh, don’t worry, I wasn’t,” laughed Runty. “Even the alligators agree you’re terrible.”

Jumper and Runty both laughed.

“Actually calling it ‘music’ might be a stretch,” said Runty laughing, “but I was thanking you for your worship.” Then Runty said more seriously, “I could not have made that last climb without it.”

They embraced and they cried. Jumper had a fire going, and Runty told him all about his journey up the crack, about learning to trust God. He even sang his song for Jumper, which Jumper loved and thought was hilarious. They sang it together for a long while.

Runty had a lot of questions Jumper could barely answer, or not, before Runty asked the next one. Finally, sometime past midnight, the embers of Jumper’s fire burned low and they both fell asleep.



“Jumper, wake up!” Runty shouted, shaking Jumper violently after only a few precious hours of sleep. Runty was excited, not fearful, and he was talking very fast. “You’ve got to see this to believe it! What is it? Look over there! I’ve never seen anything like it! What is it? It’s amazing!”

“What are you talking about, Tall One? I don’t see anything,” replied a very sleepy Jumper.

“Don’t see anything? How could you not see anything? It’s huge! It’s right there! It takes up half the sky!” said a very excited Runty.

“What?” asked Jumper again, rising up on his elbow, turning toward Runty.

“Right there!” cried Runty, pointing at the horizon. “What is that? Look at all the colors! Oranges, reds, yellows, blues! It’s fantastic! Have you ever seen anything like it? What is it?”

“Tall One, that’s just the sunrise,” said Jumper, flopping back down and rolling over. “Go back to sleep.”

“The sunrise? You mean this happens every morning? And you sleep through it? You’re crazy! This is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen! That’s a sunrise? It’s beautiful! I always thought the sun was an enemy.”

Jumper’s annoyance was giving way to amusement far too fast for him to go back to sleep now. “That’s because you only saw the sun at high noon, at its hottest and most miserable. Your canyon distorted your view of reality by only showing you the worst of it.” Jumper got up and began to make them both breakfast.

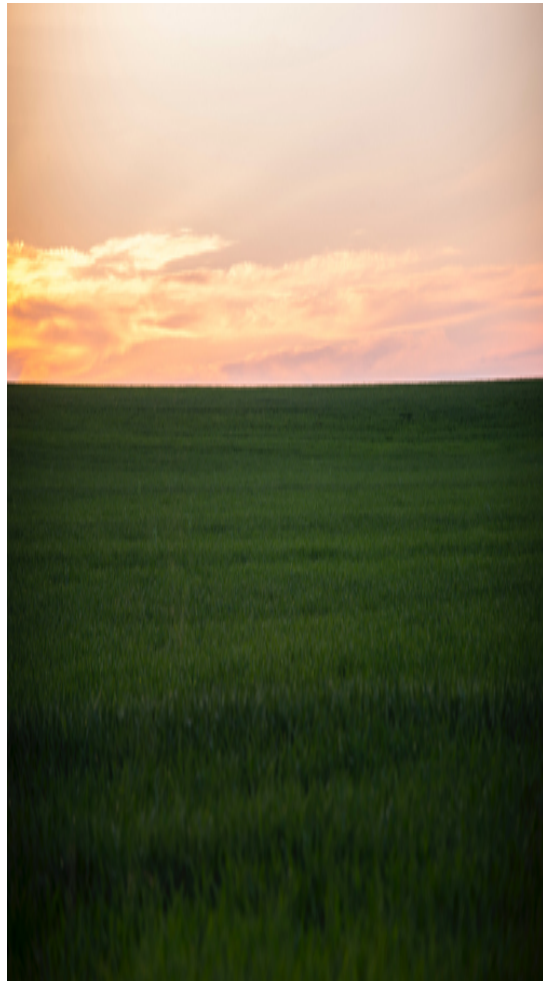
Now that it was light, Runty could see the plain. He looked around. All around. He turned 360 degrees around. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He had never seen so far in one direction before, let alone every direction at once. “So, this is freedom,” he mumbled out loud to himself.

“Yes, Tall One, welcome to life,” said Jumper.

“Stop calling me Tall One,” Runty replied by rote, almost without thinking about it, as he continued to turn around, trying to look in every direction at once.

Runty started to look worried. He looked more and more worried the more he looked around. Jumper noticed. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I don’t which way to go. You can go in any direction. I don’t know which way to go.” Runty was beginning to look genuinely panicked now. “I don’t know if I like freedom. I always knew which way to go before.”



“Relax and come eat. It’s alright, Tall One,” Jumper reassured him. “You don’t have to choose yet. I have a lot to teach you first.”

Runty sat down uneasily and started eating breakfast with Jumper. He’d never had scrambled eggs and sausage and pancakes and fresh fruit before. It was the most amazing breakfast he’d ever eaten. He especially liked the sausage, and it helped calm him down, along with the knowledge that Jumper wasn’t leaving him.

“In my canyon, I always knew which way to go,” he said, still looking around, afraid.

“There was only one way to go,” Jumper explained. “The canyon was in control. You had no say over it. Up here on the plain, you get to choose. It’s a good thing.”

“What if I make a wrong choice?”

“Once you understand more about the Kingdom of God, you’ll understand there are actually very few wrong choices you can make. But if you do make one, when you realize it, you just admit it and correct it. No big deal.”

They spent the day together, Jumper teaching Runty about the Kingdom of God, Runty constantly reminding him to not call him Tall One, and Jumper absolutely refusing to call him anything else.

But, in spite of that, Runty was actually enjoying this time. He was fascinated learning that everything he’d been taught in life up to this point was wrong. His head was exploding, but he was loving it. It seemed to Runty that the Kingdom of God took everything he thought he knew about the world, everything he took for granted as obvious, and turned it on its head.

The first are the last. The last are the first. The greatest leaders are the greatest servants. The world did not make itself. Your value is intrinsic, not based upon your actions. You are not what you do. Love cannot be earned. You can’t decide who you are, you discover who God created you to be. Asserting your own freedom over your own life leads to slavery. Submitting to God as a humble servant brings freedom. To save your life, die to yourself.

He wouldn’t have believed any of it, had it not been for his experience trusting God over all those boulders climbing out of his canyon.

He asked Jumper, “Why couldn’t I understand any of this before?”

“This is God’s timing for you. And you’ve got something now that you didn’t have before,” answered Jumper.

“What’s that?”

“Grace.”

As the day went on, Runty thought this freedom thing might not be so bad after all. He was actually starting to really enjoy it.



Until it happened. Night was falling, and Jumper had just gotten a fire started. Then it happened. A lightning flash, and a few seconds later, a thunder crack. All the fear returned in a flash and Runty reacted instinctively. He bolted. “Where’s my canyon?!?”

Jumper was hot on his heels, “Tall One, what are you doing?”

“I’ve got to find my canyon! It’s the only safe place in a storm!” screamed a panicked Runty as it began to dump rain.

He saw the Eyes in the darkness, lined up, pointing the way back to the canyon’s edge. He couldn’t see it though the torrents of rain in the darkness, but every few seconds a lightning flash would light it up. And there it was—the canyon edge—hungry and waiting for him.

Runty ran for it head long, and there was there was no way Jumper could catch him. But Jumper kept running, praying for God to send a way. Five feet from the canyon’s edge, Runty slipped in the mud. Jumper lunged and tackled him. He flung Runty in the other direction, away from the canyon’s edge. Jumper was now between Runty and the canyon.

“What are you doing?” screamed Runty over the wind and the rain. “It’s a storm! I have to get in there! I need my canyon!”

“No, it will kill you! Don’t you remember? You can’t go back!” shouted back Jumper, to be heard over the thunder.

“Your God betrayed me! There’s no shelter from the storm up here on the plain! It wasn’t supposed to storm! I need the safety and security of my canyon!”

“No, you don’t! God provided us shelter in the forest. I haven’t had time to show you yet. But you ran the wrong way.”

“I have to get back to my canyon!” Runty yelled as he charged Jumper.

“No, you don’t! Trust me, Tall One, trust me! I’ll stay with you!”

They collided violently and landed back in the mud. Jumper held on for all he was worth, but he knew, if Runty really wanted back in that canyon, Jumper couldn't stop him.

"Tall One, you're afraid," Jumper shouted to be heard over the wind as they scrambled in the mud. "It's ok to be afraid. We're all afraid sometimes. But in the Kingdom we don't let fear control us. There's another way! Trust God, Tall One, trust him! Pray and trust him right now! Or at least trust me. I won't leave you, but if you crawl back in there, I can't follow."

Jumper was losing his grip. Runty had crawled to within a foot of the canyon's edge. But just when Jumper thought he was going to break away, Runty collapsed in the mud right there. "God, if you're there, if you're really real, and all this hasn't just been a cruel farce, then help me," he whispered. Jumper was surprised he could hear Runty's whispers in the storm. He took it as a sign that something supernatural was happening here. "Help me," Runty whispered again. "Help me."

Jumper tightened his grip and pulled Runty further from the canyon's edge. Runty stopped resisting.

Runty and Jumper both happened to look up at the same time to see several pairs of Eyes coming closer, and heard their snapping jaws in the darkness. Runty started to panic again, but then he saw the look on Jumper's face, as Jumper looked at the Eyes, and it took him aback.

Runty was so surprised by Jumper's countenance he forgot to be afraid. It was a hard, stern look he'd never seen on Jumper's kind face before. It was a silent look that spoke volumes, seemingly saying to the Eyes, "*Don't you even mess with me right now!*" Then he saw something he had never seen in the Eyes before—Fear. They vanished quickly.

Runty broke down in tears, and Jumper held him, right there in the middle of the mud and the mess, in the rain and the wind and the lightening and the thunder, all night until they both fell asleep.



8 Inner Healing

Jumper awoke to Runty shaking him to see another sunrise. “They happen every day, get a grip!” said a sleepy, grumpy Jumper. “And you sleep through them? They’re amazing! Just look at that!” exclaimed Runty. “I never knew God was such an artist! Just look at his use of blues and yellows, and that splash of orange and red right there!” Then Runty pretended to get more serious, crossing his arms and holding his chin in his hand. “Do think today’s sunrise is impressionistic or more modern?”

“Alright, enough with the art lesson!” said an amusingly annoyed Jumper. “What do you want for breakfast?”



During breakfast, Runty spoke first. “Hey, I’m sorry about last night, by the way. I kind of lost my head.”

“Kind of? That’s the understatement of the year. I was there, remember?” replied Jumper.

“Yeah, don’t rub it in. Anyway, thanks for what you did for me. Staying with me and all, in spite of myself. No one’s ever fought for me before.”

“You’re worth fighting for. Everyone is. And you’re welcome. Lighten up, it’s ok.”

After a pause, Runty spoke again. “God really is trust-worthy, isn’t he? I mean, we made it through the storm last night outside my canyon. I really didn’t need it!”

“Yes he really is, and no you really didn’t. It would have killed you. Don’t ever think of going back there again.”

“No worries, that was way too close a call!”

“Yes it was,” agreed Jumper. “By the way, I have something for you.” Jumper handed Runty a book with a cross on the cover. “It’s a book of promises. God wrote it himself. We call it the Promise Book. For every situation you face, no matter how big or bad or scary, there’s a promise from God in that book that will help you walk through it successfully. But they’re hidden, it’s kind of like a game. If you find the promise, you get to use it.”



“How do you find them?” asked Runty.

“Read the book,” said Jumper.

Runty chuckled. “Don’t you ever get tired of stating the obvious?”

“No,” smiled Jumper with the obvious reply.

After breakfast, they broke camp and hiked to the forest, with Jumper teaching and answering Runty’s questions all the way. They pitched camp at the edge of the forest.

Runty had never seen trees before. The forest was a peaceful place, with a small brook running through it. It looked like paradise on Earth to Runty.

Over the next couple weeks, they had many painful but good and healing prayer conversations with God. Jumper taught Runty it wasn’t enough to deal with the bad behavior, the bad fruit. They had to deal with the root that caused it. Otherwise, that root would just pop back up in different bad behavior.

So they walked through the reasons *why* Runty had chosen to live in his canyon, all those years ago. All his pain and his fears. And lots of things he believed and just took for granted, because they were so obvious he never thought to question them. The only problem was, they weren’t true. Believing those lies had produced bad fruit in Runty’s life, locking him deeper into his canyon.



Often the present bad fruit, hurt, and pain in his life was tied to a painful memory rooted in Runty's past. Rejection. Abandonment. Words from his parents and other authority figures that tore into his soul. Abuse. Neglect. Hurt. Bad things that happened. Good things that failed to happen.

The process Jumper lead him through over and over again was almost always the same.

What had been done to Runty was wrong, and it was sin. But it was someone else's sin against him, and it was not his fault. He was not responsible for it. That revelation itself was often very liberating. Runty had often blamed himself for bad things that happened to him as a child, or the good things that failed to happen, and that lead to believing lies.

"What did you come to believe about yourself because this happened? About the world? About God?" Jumper would ask.

"I'm bad" or "I'm unlovable" or "I don't deserve love" or "Emotions are bad" or "I'm all alone" or "God hates me" or "Everybody hates me," Runty would answer.

"Ok, then how did you vow to protect your heart? 'Because I believe this, I must...' Fill in the blank, Tall One," Jumper always asked next.

Runty would admit, "I'll take care of myself" or "I won't feel the pain" or "I'll never let anyone close to me again" or "I'll reject them first before they can reject me" and many others.

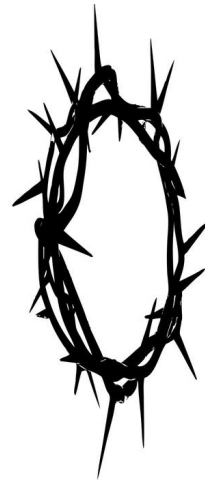
"That inner vow is your sin, Tall One, that you're responsible for," Jumper would explain. "Do you see how you're trusting your own efforts to protect your heart and not trusting God? The sin done to you is not your fault, but your sinful response to it is. The path to freedom is replacing that lie you

believe with God's truth, forgiving the person who hurt you, and repenting of and renouncing that inner vow, leaving it at the cross."

Some lies were deeply ingrained and harder to let go of than others. Sometimes Jumper would pray that God show Runty (Jumper always called him Tall One) where God was in that painful memory. The video would roll in Runty's mind, and he'd see an extra person there that he hadn't noticed during the original experience—a King in purple wearing a crown of thorns. It was Jesus.

"What's he doing?" Jumper would ask.

"He's crying" or "he's bleeding" or "he's holding me" would come Runty's answer, often with tears. Often he'd see Jesus orchestrating some "coincidence" that cut short the painful event, abuse, or whatever it was. Runty realized that even in the middle of it, Jesus was there with him and was rescuing him. He realized the things he'd blamed God for weren't God's fault at all. And God had actually rescued him in those situations. That revelation would often undo him for days.



Then Runty would confess the lie and repent for believing it. He'd repent for, and renounce, his inner vow to protect his own heart, taking it to the foot of the cross and leaving it there. Jumper would always pronounce God's forgiveness and love over him. Then they would pray and ask God what the truth was. Often it would just drop into Runty's spirit. Occasionally Jumper would share a verse from the Promise Book.

But most often, they'd break for a few hours. Runty would pray, worship, and read the Promise Book by himself (often where Jumper suggested he start). Something would leap off the page and into Runty's spirit, often the exact opposite of the lie he'd believed. He'd excitedly run and show Jumper, and they'd spend time together thanking God the Father, praising Jesus, and communing with the Holy Spirit.

One by one, with Jumper's help, Runty intentionally renounced and repented of his inner vows to protect his own heart. He tore down the structure of lies that kept the vows in place by replacing each lie with God's truth.

One of the most powerful things Runty did to tear down those lies was forgiving the people who hurt him, one by one, layer by layer. Often, he thought he'd forgiven, only to go another layer deeper a few days later. In light of God's truth that he was replacing his lies with, he was able to see those people in a new light.

"Hurt people hurt people," Jumper would explain. "They hurt you, wrongly, out of the depth of their own pain. What they did to you was evil.

Don't minimize it or make excuses for them. But they are not the evil they did to you. When you grasp that, you can release what they owe you. That's forgiveness."



Runty did grasp it, little by little, and by forgiveness released himself out of the prison he'd made for them.

Then the stuff of life would happen and re-trigger the lies he'd believed for so long. At first he needed Jumper's help to remind him of the truths he found in the Promise Book, but Runty was pretty quick on the uptake. He soon learned to enjoy reminding himself of God's truths, and watching the lie, and the fear it brought with it, evaporate in a puff of grace.

Jumper explained the healing process would continue, in seasons, throughout Runty's life. Healing would often come to areas where Runty didn't even know he was broken, but afterwards wonder, *How could I have lived like that for so long?* He would learn deeper truths in the Promise Book, go to deeper levels of forgiveness, and experience deeper levels of freedom.

They had covered tremendous ground in two weeks. Runty was a different person now. He glowed. The old lies had no more hold or power over Runty. Except one.

9 *A New Name*

Jumper knew there was one more foundational lie that still lay unchallenged at the core of Runty's identity. He wanted to go after it first and foremost when they started, but the Holy Spirit told him no. He'd learned the hard way over the years not to argue with the Spirit—it left you exhausted and the Spirit amused, and it never changed anything anyway. So he waited.

Then one day, while Jumper was praying about it, the Holy Spirit told him, “Yes. Today's the today. But not you. I got this.”

So Jumper prepped a small pack with a bedroll for Runty. “You've been trusting me so far. But God will have you for no one but himself in the end. It's time for you to learn the practice of getting alone with him, just the two of you.” Jumper handed Runty the pack. “This pack will last you a couple days, a good first outing with God. Follow the brook and you won't get lost, and you'll always have water. I'll be right here whenever you're done.”

Runty took the pack and bedroll and headed off into the woods. He was excited about getting alone with God. But he was also a little nervous. The last time he'd spent with God without Jumper near was a wild ride, up the crack and out of his canyon. That was painful, no doubt about it, but it was also very good. He wondered what God had in store for him on this outing.



He'd never had a friend before, and he was really enjoying Jumper's company. But it still bothered him that Jumper wouldn't call him by his name, Runty. His mind went back to a memory in the canyon.

“For the last time, stop calling me ‘Tall One,’ Jumper! My name’s ‘Runty!’” he remembered screaming at Jumper more than once.

“No it’s not,” Jumper would just laugh. *“You just think that because that’s what everyone calls you.”*

But if “Runty” wasn’t Runty’s name, what was it? And why couldn’t Jumper at least play along, for goodness sake, Runty asked himself.

“Because he’s my servant, and my servant can’t agree with a lie, no matter how much your discomfort wants him to,” came God’s gentle response in Runty’s head. Just like that. No fanfare. No warning. It was just there. Simple. True. Uncomfortable.

“So my name is a lie?” asked Runty.

“Runty is not your name. You took that name because your dad called you ‘the runt of the litter’ whenever you failed or made a mistake or came in last. You started subconsciously failing, sabotaging yourself, to fulfill his word-curse over you that you’d always be last. But I did not create you as the runt of the litter and Runty was never your real name.” God was baiting Runty to ask the most dangerous question.

The dam broke. Through tears pent-up for decades, Runty dared to ask it. “Then what’s my real name? Who am I?”

Runty spent the next two incredible days with God forgiving his dad and getting a huge download in answer to that question.

When he rejoined Jumper, who, unknown to Runty, had been fasting and interceding for him during his time with God, the difference in Runty’s countenance was almost tangible. The joy was almost visibly dripping off him. Jumper was overjoyed. “Met with God, did we, Tall One?” Jumper asked, dying to hear all about it.

“You can stop calling me ‘Tall One’ for real now, Jumper” laughed Runty. “No seriously. God set me free from my prison of being the runt of the litter. That’s not who I am. God gave me a new name.”

“What is it?!?” Jumper was excited. He knew the names God gives us are tied to our identity. And if Runty finally learned who he really was, whoever that was, that would be the most healing thing that could happen.

“That’s the difficult part. I’m not sure.”

“What? He gave you a new name, but you don’t know what it is? Start making sense.” Jumper was used to God not making sense, but he was not getting this at all.

“I don’t know what it means. God said you would know. I can barely say it right.”

“Well, what is it? Out with it already!”

“Sec-yeah-ah. No, that’s not right, I’m not saying it right.” Runty tried again. “Sec-qua-ah.”

Jumper thought about it. God said he was supposed to know what it meant? That meant it was a word he knew, Runty just wasn’t saying it right. He searched his brain for anything close to the syllables Runty was stumbling over. He could only find one word.

“Sequoia?” Jumper asked, confused.

“Yes! Sequoia! That’s how God said it! That’s my name! Sequoia. What does it mean?”

Jumper began to laugh. “Tall One, I mean Sequoia, the sequoia trees are the tallest trees on the planet! They get over 200 feet high.”

Runty, that was still what he called himself, was disappointed. “Oh, so it’s some spiritual thing. Or God’s mocking me too.”

“God’s not mocking you, Sequoia. He’s telling you who you are. You’re not short, you never were. That’s why I refused to buy into the lie and call you ‘Runty.’ Stand up to your full height! You’ve never really tried before.”

Runty never really stood or walked completely upright. He bear-walked and scampered a lot. He slouched and cowered and hunched.

“I am standing straight up,” he said, very confused, and not liking this at all.

“No you’re not. Look at your shadow.”

Runty turned to look at his shadow. It looked like a question mark. *Wow, I am hunched over!* He’d never realized it before. He’d thought this was normal.

“Watch your shadow. Keep drawing yourself up until your shadow is straight,” Jumper said. He always had very practical advice.



Runty did. Every time he thought he was standing straight up, he'd look back at his shadow and realize he could straighten up a little more. Finally, his shadow was straight and tall and so was he.

Runty turned back to Jumper and saw something he'd never seen before. The top of Jumper's head. He towered a good two feet above Jumper!

"Sequoia, you're eight feet tall!" laughed Jumper. "No wonder the enemy kept you in a canyon and called you 'Runty' all these years!"

"I thought I was short because I always had to look up at people."

"You looked up at people because you lived in a canyon, not because you were short!"

"That canyon robbed me of decades of who I really was!" Runty, I mean Sequoia, realized for the first time. "And to think I almost went back to it!"

It was the first time Sequoia had referred to the canyon without calling it "his canyon." Jumper took that as a very good sign.

A righteous hatred began to burn in Sequoia. He'd hated the canyon the night he left it, but now he began to really despise it, as he realized the magnitude of all it had stolen from him. Being eight feet tall, he realized he had to live in a canyon to live out the false identity of being the runt of the litter!

"I want to bulldoze that canyon into the ground!" he shouted to nobody in particular.

"I've got a better idea for revenge," said Jumper. "There are other canyon dwellers, in much deeper canyons than I can jump in and out of. I can't reach them. But you can. With your height, you can jump much further than I."

"Let's go, what are we waiting for? Show me!" insisted an impatient Sequoia.

Jumper just laughed that infectious laugh of his. "Cool your jets, big guy. There's a couple things you still need to learn first."

10 *The Gators*

Sequoia eagerly soaked up all Jumper and God had to teach him. He was thoroughly enjoying his time with Jumper now, building a secret history with God, and having the time of his life finding new promises in the Promise Book. He was learning in days what had taken Jumper years. Jumper figured God had Sequoia on the fast track to make up for lost time.

But Jumper was stalling for a particular experience he knew Sequoia needed before being released into his personal ministry to free other canyon dwellers. It wasn't something Jumper could manufacture or set up. It had to happen on its own, and in God's timing. Jumper had to wait. And although he'd learned to wait over the long years, he still didn't like it, which he was playfully sure God found amusing.

Then one day, out of the blue, all of a sudden, it happened.

It was still daylight, but the afternoon was getting on. They were walking through the tall grass on the plain looking for firewood for tonight's fire, about 50 yards apart, when suddenly a large alligator leapt out of the tall grass and began to pursue Sequoia, who ran for all he was worth, the gator hot on his heels.

It was very rare to see them in daylight; in fact, Sequoia never had before. They were always just the Eyes torturing his nights in the canyon.

"Awesome!" said Jumper out loud to nobody in particular. It had finally happened!

"I can think of a lot of adjectives to describe this situation, Jumper, but 'awesome' isn't one of them! A little help here!" shouted Sequoia. He was running a very wide clockwise circle, with a radius of about 50 yards, around Jumper, so he could stay within earshot.



"Don't try to out run it, you can't!" shouted back Jumper.

"Gee, thanks for the hot tip! What am I supposed to do, stop?" yelled Sequoia. He was very concerned that Jumper didn't seem to be.

"No, of course don't stop, you'll get eaten!" Jumper laughed.

“Thank loads, Captain Obvious! Don’t stop and don’t run! You’re not leaving me a lot of options here!” shouted a desperate Sequoia, barely staying ahead of the gator’s snapping jaws.

“Don’t stop but don’t run straight either!” shouted Jumper. “Maneuver!”

Sequoia made a sharp 90-degree pivot to his right, and to his surprise, the gator continued straight, right past him. It stopped in about 30 feet, and tried to look around, very confused. But it could only turn its head 5 degrees to either side. It kept trying to find Sequoia within that narrow field-of-view. Finally, it decided Sequoia must’ve turned on a burst of speed and bolted out-of-sight ahead. It took off running in the same straight line, away from Sequoia and Jumper, determined to run down its lunch.

“They’re really not very bright,” said Jumper when he rejoined Sequoia. “They have no concept of anything existing outside their narrow field-of-view, and they have no peripheral vision. If you stop or run straight, you’re playing by their rules and you’re lunch. So we change the rules. All you have to do is maneuver and they’re actually very easy to evade.”

“You might have shared all that with me a bit sooner,” panted Sequoia.

“I told you when you needed to know,” said Jumper, very matter-of-factly, as if there was nothing strange at all about his timing.

“Barely!” Sequoia said, still reeling from his close call.

“Welcome to life in the Kingdom,” said Jumper with a smile.

“Sequoia,” Jumper said as they got back to looking for firewood, “there’s one more thing you need to know about the alligators. If, on the rare occasion, you can’t shake them, use your knife.”

Jumper pulled out an 8” Bowie knife from a sheath on his belt that Sequoia had never noticed before. “Don’t go hunting them, but if they come after you and won’t back off... Carve. Them. Up.”

“You have one, too,” continued Jumper, pointing to Sequoia’s belt, where a knife hung in the same sheath Jumper had. Sequoia had never noticed it before.

“How and when did that get there?” Sequoia asked out loud. He drew the knife and admired it respectfully.



“Standard issue in the Kingdom,” explained Jumper. “God’s given us everything we need for life and godliness, which is in the Promise Book, by the way. The sad part is when God’s people go down as alligator-chow for not using the weapons they didn’t know they had.”

“By the way,” continued Jumper, “remember that sausage you liked so much that first breakfast out of the canyon?”

“Yeah, it was amazing!” remembered Sequoia. He’d never tasted anything like it.

“That was alligator. One got uppity with me earlier in the evening and wouldn’t back off. It didn’t like me setting up camp and worshipping outside the crack you were making your way up.”

“Did it get upset before or after you started singing?” laughed Sequoia.

“Before, smart guy!” answered Jumper.

“Did it think you were in its territory?”

“It probably did, in its arrogance. But they have no real territory unless we let them. Don’t let them. We don’t go looking for trouble, but if they interfere with our God-given assignment, they’ve found it. No quarter.”

Sequoia remembered the tortuous nights he’d spent terrified by the Eyes in the canyon. And all you have to do to evade them is maneuver? No wonder they had him boxed into a slot canyon where he couldn’t maneuver! He looked forward to using his knife.

Jumper saw the look on Sequoia’s face. “Last resort,” Jumper reminded him.

11 Meeting the Tall Ones

Jumper was shaken awake the next morning to watch another sunrise with Sequoia. “What is it with you?” muttered Jumper. “It looks a lot like the sunset we watched last night after your gator race.”

“I know, right?” said a still fascinated Sequoia. “Isn’t it magnificent? And the thing that gets me the most is he doesn’t just do these amazing paintings every evening and every morning on the biggest canvas in the world, he paints in *time*, also. Every moment it changes into something even more spectacular.”

“Newbies,” Jumper muttered under his breath. “Maybe we’ll get lucky and it’ll rain on us tomorrow so we can sleep to a decent hour.”

After breakfast they broke camp and headed into town. “Time to meet the folks you used to call ‘the Tall Ones.’ Just warning you up front,” said Jumper, “they’re not how you imagined them.”

“What, are they short like I thought I was?” asked Sequoia.

“No, they’re the same height as I am, but they’re much shorter,” answered Jumper.

“You’re not making sense at all, but so what else is new?” said Sequoia.

“You’ve got to see it to understand it,” explained Jumper.

“Just once, can’t you explain something ahead of time, before we experience it?” asked Sequoia, although he knew the answer. He just asked to poke Jumper.

“Well, the short answer is...” Jumper paused and then continued, “No. Welcome to the Kingdom, Sequoia,” Jumper laughed.

Sequoia laughed, too. He was starting to get how things worked in the Kingdom. Almost too late but always right on time. Often annoyingly counter-intuitive, but always good.

They reached the town where the Tall Ones lived. It was filled with normal people doing normal things. There were no great pains, but no great joys either. Everything was normal, ordinary, very average, and very, very boring.

The Tall Ones recognized Jumper instantly.

“Hey, religious trouble maker!” they called. “What brings you in here? And who’s your giant friend?”

“You know him,” answered Jumper. “His name is Sequoia, although you used to call him by another name. He used to live in that canyon over there.” Jumper pointed in the general direction of Sequoia’s former canyon.

The Tall Ones gathered around, bobbing and swaying as they walked.



“Runty? Goodness, why, it’s the runt!” they exclaimed in utter surprise, looking way up at Sequoia. “We never expected you get out of that canyon!”

“Jumper showed me the way, and then God led me out,” stammered Sequoia, quite slowly, as he towered over the Tall Ones.

He couldn’t believe his eyes! They were all, yes, about as tall as Jumper, give or take, on average about six feet. But they stood only three or four feet from the ground, because they all walked on their knees. Their feet were bound up behind them, with straps on their ankles going up over their shoulders. No wonder they bobbed and swayed when they walked—walking on your knees, most of your effort goes sideways. And no wonder he could only see part of their heads peeking over the canyon edge.

“You’d have gotten out of that canyon a lot sooner if Jumper hadn’t broken the ladder we so generously gave you,” lectured Daddy Hoos-It.

“Runty, how did you get so tall? What’s wrong with you? I’m sure our medics can fix it,” another said, trying to be helpful.

“You’d do well to stay away from that Jumper-nut, Runty. He’ll brain-wash you” said another, very confident, knee-walker.

“No, my name’s ‘Sequoia’ now...,” began Sequoia.

“Too late,” said the confident knee-walker.

“No, you don’t understand, Jumper’s...” Sequoia began again, but Jumper put a hand on his arm with a smile.

“It’s alright,” said Jumper. “Save your breath. Don’t try to explain it.”

Sequoia looked around at the crowd that had gathered and, among the sea of negative expressions, disdain, and rejection toward Jumper and himself, he saw one smile. The Sandwich Lady. “I’m very happy for you, Runty, I mean,

Sequoia,” she said. And she meant it. He stooped down, gave her a big hug, and then stood back up.

“Thank you for all the help you gave me in the canyon,” smiled Sequoia. “They were really good sandwiches.”

“You’re very welcome, Run-, I mean, Sequoia,” and she curtseyed.



“Runty, come now, let’s be serious,” said a very serious knee-walker, whose jowled cheeks shook as he talked. “You’ve got a very serious problem there being so freakishly tall.

“Granted, we can’t fix all of it, that’s just the way you are and you’ll have to live with that deformity. But we can fix part of it. Come now, let’s bind your legs so you can at least walk on your knees like a normal person.” He took out a couple of long, ankle straps.

“No, I don’t want to walk on my knees!” Sequoia answered. “You’re supposed to walk on your feet!”

“Runty, come be reasonable,” said the serious knee-walker. “If God had wanted us to walk on our feet, he wouldn’t have given us knees.”

“That’s the first time I’ve ever heard you mention God, Professor!” quipped Jumper.

“God has a place just like everything else,” shot back the very serious, knee-walking, Professor, with his finger wagging up toward Jumper’s face, “and he’d do well to stay in it!”

“Good luck with that,” laughed Jumper.

“Now, come, Runty, kneel down,” ordered the Professor, “and we’ll get you walking normal again, and away from the extremes of this, this, outcast Jumper, person.” The Professor glared at Jumper.

“But I do walk normal!” objected Sequoia. “All of you are the ones who don’t walk normal!”

“The two of you are right and the rest of the world is wrong?” asked the serious, and now very offended, knee-walking Professor. “Look at all of us! We all walk on our knees! We are normal! The two of you are not normal!”

“Your town is not the rest of the world,” reminded Jumper, which gave the Professor a coughing fit.

“Runty, kneel down here right now,” ordered the Professor sternly, when he’d recovered his composure, “and we’ll fix you right up.”

Sequoia looked panicky at Jumper. “Jumper...” *Was this really going to happen? Were they really going to bind his feet up his back and make him walk on his knees?*

Jumper’s infectious laugh broke the tension of the moment. “Sequoia, you’re eight feet tall and they walk on their knees. There’s no way they can bind you unless you let them.”

“Oh.” Sequoia began a thin smile, visibly relieved. “Right.”

He turned back to the Professor. “Look, I appreciate the offer,” Sequoia said, “but no thanks. And, by the way, it’s not a deformity. God made me tall, and I’m learning to be who he made me to be. Sorry if that doesn’t fit into your box. And my name is ‘Sequoia.’ Please don’t call me ‘Runty’ anymore.”

“You’ll be sorry,” said the Professor, visibly shaken and starting to twitch, hardly able to believe his ears. “The first time you fall from way up there, you’ll be sorry. Much safer down here. You’ll see. Better for everyone down here. You’ll see.” And he bobbed, swayed, and walked away, shaking his head and those enormous jowls, twitching and talking to himself. “Try as you might, you just can’t reason with some people...”

Jumper nodded toward the General Store, and he and Sequoia got the items they needed, got some lunch, and left knee-walker town.

“I cut the straps once off a couple of them, trying to set them free,” recalled Jumper as they walked out of town. “They screamed like bloody-murder and laid on the ground until the medics re-bound them. They tried to put me in jail, but they couldn’t catch me. That part, at least, was amusing. We have an unspoken arrangement now and tolerate each other, although I watch my back whenever I’m in there. You have to watch out for nets.”

“How did they ever get like that?” asked a still flabbergasted Sequoia.

“I don’t know how it started, but it’s a deception of the alligators. You can’t out-manuever an alligator on your knees. The gators can pick them off one-by-one at their choosing. It’s very sad.”

“And the saddest part is it doesn’t have to be that way,” mused Sequoia.

“No, it doesn’t,” agreed Jumper. “God sends them messengers, over and over again, and every once in a while a couple get free. But the dominant trend is they ignore God and lean on their own understanding.”

They made camp that night just outside the forest, had a great dinner, and watched a magnificent sunset. Jumper got out his guitar and they worshipped late into the night.

12 *The Free Outcast*

When he'd finally gotten free of the canyon, Sequoia never expected to be rejected by the ones he formerly called the Tall Ones, whom he'd respected as having their act together and being all that. Their rejection was very hurtful, as was seeing them in their bound state. They even refused to recognize that being bound was a bad thing. His heart ached for them. The more he thought about yesterday's meeting, the sadder he got.

"C'mon, Sequoia," said Jumper after they'd broke camp, "there's another group of people you need to meet. This meeting will lift your spirits. It's time to meet the Community."

"Community of what?" asked Sequoia.

"Believers," answered Jumper.

Jumper lead him deep into the forest, following the brook, to a glade where a lot of people were gathered. Normal people, who actually walked on their feet, Sequoia noticed.

There were people of all sizes, short, tall, big, and small. Sequoia was not the tallest there, but he was in the top 5%. There were people of all colors: black, red, yellow, white, brown. About an equal spread of men and women. Some of them were playing worship music, some were worshipping, some were baking for the banquet that night, some writing, some painting, some were doing other odd jobs. Each was skillful at what he or she did, and they did it joyfully. There was no complaining, and they all seemed to truly enjoy each other's company and appreciate each other's giftings.

You felt peaceful and safe just being around these people. They welcomed Jumper and Sequoia with the friendly banter of family.



Even when you just met them, you felt like you'd known them all your life. You felt like you were home.

But the most remarkable thing about them, Sequoia noticed, was they were all unique. You couldn't pick out any patterns of dress, hair style, accent, or anything else. Many were similar, there were natural groups, but there was no majority. It was like they had no outward expectations at all. There was complete freedom, but always expressed in respectful modesty. It was like they looked past the outside and shared their hearts openly and freely with each other. It was invigorating.

After Jumper and Sequoia had soaked for about an hour in the best worship Sequoia had ever experienced, Jumper said, "C'mon, there's someone I want you to meet."

Jumper lead Sequoia to a small man, only one foot tall. "Foggy, it's good to see you," called Jumper, who got down on his knees to embrace Foggy. "This is my friend Sequoia."

"Pleasure to meet you, Sequoia! Don't tell me you've been subjected to worship out on the plain with this bum," said Foggy playfully, motioning at Jumper.

"It's been an experience," laughed Sequoia. "His singing does chase away the alligators."

"Within a 20-mile radius," laughed Foggy. "Make sure you see me before you leave, I've got a pair of earplugs for you."

"Alright, you two," laughed Jumper. "I'd bang your heads together if I could reach them both at the same time!" All three laughed.

"So tell me, Sequoia, what's your story? What has God done for you?" asked Foggy.

Sequoia shared his story, and Foggy was genuinely interested, especially about how Sequoia thought his name was "Runty" and thought he was short because he lived in a canyon and always looked up at everybody.

"My story's the same, but in reverse," said Foggy. "I'm a foot tall, but I lived in a tunnel ten inches high. I was always banging my head against the ceiling, so I thought I was really tall. I called myself 'Giant.' Everyone else had to crawl to get into the tunnel, so I was always looking down on them, which fed the deception of being really tall."

"How did you get out?" asked Sequoia.

"Through a hole in the side of the tunnel that Jumper pointed out. I thought I was too big to ever fit through it, until one day I tried. Then at the end, I had to crawl along a very unstable looking cross over a bottomless gorge to finally exit through a small hole to the outside world. I had to choose between being

the Big Man in my tunnel or a little man crawling along the cross. I chose the cross and have never looked back. Jesus is so worth it!”

“Foggy rescues avalanche and landslide victims,” Jumper explained. “He’s small enough that he can go over the slide without disturbing it any further, and fit into the small holes between the rocks to find the victims. Then, knowing where they are, the rest of us can remove the rocks without crushing them.”

“It’s my life’s work, and I love it,” said Foggy. “I could never do it while the alligators had me convinced I was a giant!”

Sequoia was awed. Everyone he met here seemed to be freed from some sort of false identity. Not necessarily a false identity that was blatantly opposite who they really were, like Sequoia and Foggy, but always a false identity that prevented them from being who they really were.

“Why do you call him ‘Foggy?’ Is that the name God gave him?” Sequoia asked Jumper later.

“It’s a play-on-words,” answered Jumper, “of the acronym of the name that God gave him, F-O-G.”

“What’s it stand for,” asked Sequoia.

“Foot of Gold,” said Jumper.

Sequoia was not surprised. After spending any time at all around the little man, his love was dripping all over you. Foggy was free, like everyone else in the Community.



“Being short or being tall is not the problem,” continued Jumper. “Thinking you’re short when you’re actually tall, or thinking you’re tall when you’re actually short, that’s the problem. Most people spend most of their lives hating something about the way God made them and wishing it were different. It’s spiritual rebellion, really. Freedom comes when we embrace who God created us to be, regardless of the risk.”

During the banquet that night, which was the most amazing and largest family meal Sequoia had ever experienced, and the worship time that followed, Sequoia got major downloads from God about his true identity, his purpose, his destiny, his calling, and his

mission. Some were from Heaven directly into his spirit, others were prophetic words from other people who didn't know him, but yet spoke with impossible accuracy.

Sequoia worked with Jumper rescuing others from canyons. Since Jumper had not ever lived in a canyon himself, he could only jump down so deep. But Sequoia could jump down into much deeper canyons than Jumper could even dream of jumping down. Sequoia got the hardest cases.

He learned to rescue others from how Jumper had rescued him. With patience. Over time. Building relationships. Always telling the truth. Non-judgmentally, always lovingly, but truthfully. Refusing to play into the alligator's lies even the tiniest bit. Following the Lord's leading.

Sequoia did not mind in the slightest being considered an outcast by the knee-walkers. He was too busy living his adventure in freedom. He recharged his emotional, physical, and spiritual batteries frequently, as Jumper had taught him, with time in the forest, both alone with God and with the Community.

Sequoia was never scared of an alligator again. In fact, they grew quite frightened of him. He perfected a BBQ recipe that was famous throughout the plain.



Epilogue

We all have our canyon, don't we? That deception we cling to, to keep us safe, to protect our heart. Only it doesn't work, and it will kill us in the end. It's robbing us of living the adventure God created us for. But there's good news.

We don't have to live in our self-made prison. Jesus wants to set us truly free. He wants to walk with us in the destiny he created us for.

My wife Janet & I are speakers and life coaches. We help Christians stuck in brokenness live their God-given identity in wholeness, so they can fulfill the destiny God created them for. We would love to hear from you. What's your story? Are you stuck in a canyon, or has God lead you out? Where are you in the process?



You can connect with us either through our website:

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Enjoy the Journey - Love the Learning!

A Note about the Title...

Originally I'd named this story, and the main character, "Midget." A friend told me that word is a pejorative term among little people. I certainly didn't want, in a book about identity, to dishonor someone else's identity.

So I emailed the Little People of America and asked them about it, attaching a copy of the story. I got a very timely and courteous reply back from their Public Relations Director, Ms. Cuquis Robledo.

She graciously complemented me on the story and then explained they are trying to educate people away from using the word "midget" at all. They call it the "m-word." It was used during the freak show era to dehumanize them, and hence it's very offensive to their community.

So I voluntarily changed the name of my story to "The Runt." And I think it actually improved the story; it let me weave in the "runt of the litter" foundational lie.

This is not political correctness gone mad. When my dad was growing up, Brazil nuts were called "n-word" toes. I'm glad they are called Brazil nuts now.

As a pro-life, intimate lover of Jesus, I look forward to when all dehumanizing, insulting, language lands on the trash heap of history alongside the n-word; including the m-word, all racial slurs, "fetus" and "blob of tissue."

May our language ever honor the humanity and dignity of all human beings, our brothers and sisters.