

Calming the Storm

By Sharon Jaynes

A storm was brewing somewhere off in the distance. I could smell the scent of the summer rain mingling with the dry earth. Trees were beginning to wave their arms and fingers in warning as the breeze rustled through the leaves. Quickly, I closed my book and ran into the house.

“Bye Steve,” I called out as I ran through the kitchen, grabbing my pocketbook and car keys. “I’ve put off going to the grocery store all day and now a storm’s coming. I need a few items for Sunday lunch tomorrow and I’m going to try to beat the rain.” I said all of this in one breath as I dashed past Steve in a whirlwind.

“Bye,” Steve called after me. “Be careful and slow down!”

Driving down Monroe Road, I was glad the grocery store was only a few miles away. Just ahead loomed a dark nimbus cloud flashing heat lightening in the summer sky.

Speedily, I whipped into the parking lot, dashed through the automatic doors, grabbed my three items, and zipped through the express lane. I was quick, but not quick enough. I had lost my race with the storm. Torrential rains poured from the sky in sideways sheets, blocking the parking lot from view. Other last minute shoppers waited under the shelter for the storm to pass, or at least ease up a bit. Conceding, I went back into the store to wait this one out. It was then I heard a baby crying – not an uncommon sound in a grocery store.

But there was something about the cry that stirred my heart. The cry drew my attention to a weary mother with groceries piled high in her shopping buggy, standing in the check-out line. Two carefree little girlfriends, about seven years old, stood on one side of her, singing, giggling, and clapping their playful hands together. I imagined they were having a sleep over and my mind raced back to many such carefree Saturday nights years ago.

In stark contrast to the playful duo, on the other side of the mother stood the crying little sister. Her sad eyes were bloodshot, her face was contorted with

sadness, and her dress was moist from tears that dripped from her chin. It was then that I realized that while a storm was raging outside the building, there was a greater storm brewing within its walls. There was something about the toddler's cry that pulled at my heart strings. Was she tired? Was she hungry?

I couldn't tell at first, but someone told me to watch closely and I would soon find out. The little girl, not yet two, held up her arms to her mommy, begging to be picked up, but instead, her mother jerked her from side to side. "Didn't I tell you to shut up. Now be quiet," she barked.

With that, her crying grew louder. She then toddled around her mother and walked behind the check-out counter. Still wailing, she reached up her pleading arms to the cashier. The stranger, obviously uncomfortable, kept her eyes on the task at hand and acted as if the child were not there at all. She never made eye contact or acknowledge the urchin at her side.

The older sister, thinking the scene rather humorous, pulled her sibling out from behind the counter. "Tasha, come out from there. You don't even know that lady," she scolded.

Still crying, little Tasha turned and noticed I was watching. We locked eyes, which to her seemed like an invitation. It was. Tasha walked over to me, wrapped

As I patted her back, she put her thumb in her mouth and quieted her heart. I then understood the source of the cry. It was hunger after all. Hunger for love.

After a minute or two, Tasha pulled back, looked up at me, and held up her arms. Her mother, as well as everyone else held captive by the storm, was watching.

"May I hold her?" I asked the mom.

She nodded. I picked up little Tasha. She nestled her head against my chest and continued to quietly suck her thumb as I swayed gently back and forth. Her hunger was satisfied, if only for a moment, as I fed her with my touch.

Tasha's sister and her friend came bouncing over, curious about this lady who held her sister.

"I like your dress," one said.

I like your green velour shirt,” I countered.

“I’d like to go home with you,” the first one whispered.

I just smiled, but my heart wept. Perhaps there was a storm brewing in the sister’s heart as well.

All too soon, the storm cloud passed and the pelting rain slowed to a drizzle. Reluctantly, I handed the toddler back to her mother, who most likely was hungry for love as well.

After bidding the giggling duo farewell, I dashed to my car. I waved goodbye as they watched me drive away – a smile on my face and tears trickling down my cheeks.

Jesus still calms the storms – and sometimes He uses our arms to do it.