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Jesus Loves Me

Wendell Casey*

*Iowa State College

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Abstract

"Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so..." Louise could hear Cindy's favorite song as she walked toward the apartment. "Cindy, Mommie's home." Louise stopped a moment, shifted the heavy sack of groceries and caught the door before it could bang the wall...

Jesus Loves Me

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“JESUS loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so . . .”

Louise could hear Cindy's favorite song as she walked toward the apartment. “Cindy, Mommie's home.” Louise stopped a moment, shifted the heavy sack of groceries and caught the door before it could bang the wall.

She gave a quick disgusted look. The apartment had been the only place Louise had known since her marriage five years ago. Every piece of furniture was second hand and made over. The couch was a musty cotton bale with a leg missing that someone had replaced with a brick. The refrigerator smelled like rotten vegetables every time she opened the door, and the curtains were so faded and smeared where people had wiped their hands for lack of a dish towel or anything else handy. The wallpaper had long since turned yellow like discarded newspapers left in an attic, and the odor that lingered was one of preserved beer orgies and puffs of cheap cigars. It hadn't changed but Louise thought it was uglier for some reason.

“Hi, darling. And how's my big girl today? Have you been good?” Louise set the frozen dinners and instant food in the corner of the couch and turned in time to feel Cindy's arms wrap around her waist. For a minute, she felt secure and needed.

“Hey, Mommy, can I have a new dress for Barbie? Can I? It's almost spring and all she has is that ski outfit. Pam said I could play with her kitchen and her mommy let us play with her Gobbly Gook. Could I have a new dress for Barbie? Please, could I?”

Louise tried to listen to Cindy, but every time their eyes met, she was forced to think about her and Brock's separation. It had been almost three weeks since she had seen him. At first he wouldn't accept the idea of a divorce and he persisted in calling and being abusive, but Louise knew there was nothing he could do once she had signed the papers for the procedure.

Brock was only two inches taller than she, but what he

lacked in height he made up in muscles. They had gone together since their sophomore year in high school. She had always been his girl but not the way she'd wanted to be. He was mean, moody and never really thoughtful, but she liked the idea of belonging to someone the kids looked up to and feared.

"Cindy, Mommy's got to go across the hall and pay the baby sitter. You be good and I'll be right back." Louise glanced in the cracked mirror, smiled, and touched the back of her hair reassuringly. She didn't particularly care for the small chat with Mrs. Storey because of the guilty feeling that came whenever the sitter looked at her.

Cindy sat on the floor amid broken crayons, torn story books, and cheap dime store toys. "Hey, Mommy, when's Daddy coming home?" Her shrill little voice ran out the doorway into the hall.

Louise in a state of frustration shoved the money into Mrs. Storey's hands before anything could be said and retreated back to her apartment. "Daddy won't be home for a long time, and you mustn't ask such questions, do you understand!"

Cindy was going to ask why, but she knew by the look in her mother's eyes she'd better let well enough alone. For the present, she accepted the situation as one of those silly games adults play and went back to crayon scribbling, humming something her daddy had taught her.

As if lightning had struck next door, the telephone pierced the silence. Instantly Cindy rushed for it. Louise joined the race, but tripped on the edge of the linoleum. There was a moment of pain from this provoked exasperation, but it was soon lost as Cindy spoke.

"Hel-lo . . . O.K., I'll get her." Before Cindy could yell, Louise took the phone and turned her back.

"Hello . . . What do you want? I told you not to call here again! Are you drunk? . . . No, I don't want to see you! . . . Because you've been drinking, that's why! . . . Go call one of your girl friends and quit bothering me! Good bye!"

The absence of sound again filled the room as Cindy looked at her mother. Louise was like a ruffled kitten, not knowing how to defend herself or what to do next. She spotted the groceries still sitting on the couch, walked over,

picked them up, and went into the make-shift kitchen. As she was putting the frozen dinners in the oven the telephone rang again.

“Don’t you answer that, Cindy!” her voice wavered.

Ring . . . silence . . . Ringing. The phone ticked away the seconds. Ringing.

“Hello! . . . Let us alone, I’m trying to get supper. . . . No, you can’t come over! . . . If you do, I’ll call the police! Do you hear?” The telephone tingled from the slam of the receiver into its cradle as Louise’s body turned away in a violent effort, to escape.

“Cindy, go back to your toys!” Cindy picked up her story book and hurried to her cluster of playthings.

Louise set the card table for supper, poured half a glass of milk for the little girl, dumped some potato chips into a bowl and took the precooked dinners out of the gas oven. “Come on, dear, it’s time to eat supper. I’ll cut your meat while you put on your bib.”

The pounding on the door startled both of them. Louise shrank, grabbing Cindy at the same time. Her lungs labored in short quick breaths and fear ran through every line of her face.

“Let me in!” The outraged voice pounded at the door. “Let me in or I’ll break it down!”

Cindy could feel the trembling terror as her mother pulled her closer. She had never known this side of her as she looked wide-eyed at her. “Don’t be afraid, Mommy! We’ll be safe, I know we will. Daddy told me whenever I was afraid to sing “Jesus Loves Me” and everything would be all right.”

Cindy looked at her mother, then at the door. “Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so . . . Little ones to him belong. They are weak but he is strong. . . .”

Footsteps left the door and died in the muffled echoes of the hallway. Everything was quiet now except for Cindy’s little voice repeating the chorus.