

A Misunderstanding

by Nancy Martz

Squirring in my high chair, banging my spoon into the soft mash and marveling as a spray of bananas and carrots hit the wall, I saw that staining things and leaving a mess sometimes made my mother laugh, and other times, scowl and scold. Even then, I sat clueless about how the same things could be good sometimes and bad other times, right sometimes and wrong other times, laughable sometimes, and disgusting other times. Yet I observed this to be true at a very young age.

Now, many years later, I pitched words against the courtroom walls in sprays of many layered sophisms confounding the seated jury about what could be believed and what reasonably doubted. It was a gaming role I played, to see if I could trounce the prosecution.

Today, however, I wasn't addressing a jury. My long time buddy Lester Wright had asked me to speak about the death penalty to a private group of citizens and with the curtain about to open I thought a Bible verse might engage them.

Biblical wisdom, I mused as I waited, and recalled the Sunday when, yet a boy, I had remained seated in the pew while all my peers approached the altar for their first communion. I had felt my mother's eyes glaring incredulously at the back of my head, but the Reverend had cautioned that taking communion while harboring doubt would stain it for the others. Reasonable doubt immobilized me, but did that mean I believed there was something that *could* be stained? Had I not *actually* believed, *why* would it have mattered? I thought a flicker of amusement crossed the Reverend's face as he pressed the wafer on tongues and said, "Take, Eat, This is My Body."

Then Lester broke my reverie to ask if I were ready as the curtain was about to be drawn. I noticed a spot on his collar and was swept in an instant to my youth and the spotless collar of the Reverend shining white in the moonlight as he watched through the basement window at us sweating in our chairs trying to recall Bible verses. We were taking a confirmation test, and upon leaving the room, the Reverend had told us we were on the honor system. I chuckled and nodded to Lester that I was ready.

Genesis Eleven, I suddenly thought could apply, and I ran it through my mind how the Lord had seen that all the people of the world spoke the same language, lived as one, and understood one another. And because of that...*that* ...he had confounded their language and scattered them around the world to prevent them from understanding. It was all just a designed misunderstanding.

Then the curtain opened. I didn't see the Reverend but I hadn't expected him. I last saw him sitting in a pew with a man who raised a gun and left my mother a widow. I tried to open my mouth and felt my mother glaring incredulously at my head, as the hood came down and I received 2000 volts.