

## First Pasture

# *Rediscovery*



Sophia emerged from the classroom teary-eyed with disappointment. For the second time in as many quarters in this seventh grade year of intermediate school, she had been turned down for a part in a school drama. Her longstanding aspiration was to become a professional actor, but she couldn't even land a supporting role in a middle school play.

"Sophia, your ability to recite multiple lines of dialogue — your memory is just not sharp enough to play this part," one drama teacher would judge with subtle precision.

"Sophia, we're looking for a girl with a specific look for this part," another competitive teacher would explain with inadvertent insensitivity to the vulnerable young soul. "We're looking for someone, how should I put this, with more engaging facial features for this particular character."

Sophia had heard it all. And Sophia had experienced it all. She realized she was not gifted academically as she had, as long as she could remember, toiled to attain passing marks in elementary school despite laboring through three years of Kumon and five years of extra support in an A+ after-school program. She oftentimes had her head in the clouds when she needed to be paying attention to how to recognize misplaced modifiers or how to convert common units of measurement, trivial processes tidily scrawled on a far-off chalkboard.

"Not exactly the stuff dreams are made of," Sophia would complain to her freckled confidant Greg through recess and lunch.

Sophia's was a mind that traveled around the world in eighty minutes during science class, and an obsession that frequented hundreds of movies burnt on dozens of DVDs cataloged in a teenage girl's drawer. This dreamer was always elsewhere, "flying" at the bow of a fated ship or propositioning a

misplaced millionaire near Mann's Chinese Theatre in Beverly Hills. It was a naïve hope on a planet of its own, an alternate reality in which a nameless Filipina darling emerged as a star. In this utopia, a sensitive young artist was never turned down for a role. In this classroom, a child with a learning disability never failed. To Sophia, it was a world she felt more comfortable in to be sure, a land where her dreams came true.

For a long time, Sophia yearned for her parents to be as involved in her acting aspirations as her classmates' parents were with their respective children's ambitions. Sophia's folks were always satisfied, maybe too content with their daughter's run of the mill performance in school. Sophia was their only child, and they were just glad she was a healthy young girl. In fact, Sophia's parents had been trying and failing for years to have a child, and felt fortunate when their daughter came into this world. They did not aspire to produce a sports prodigy, singing sensation or Rhodes scholar. Instead, they just hoped to raise a girl with a smile on her face, who arrived at school on time and returned home before dark.

Alone at bedtime with famed actors of yesteryear gazing down upon her from the four corners of her room, their two-dimensional legacies haunting her wistful thoughts, Sophia would pray to a God, to a Savior she thought may have abandoned her.

"God, please help me become an actress. Give me the strength, Lord, to carry on. Guide me on this journey, Father, I can't do this alone..."

~ 1 ~

### **Teacher Conference**

As she had, at least once per school year, for the past eight years of her fragile life, Sophia approached a classroom outside normal teacher work hours. It was almost four o'clock at this home away from home that was now quiet, chilly and abandoned. Yet, Sophia began to hear the whispers of the ghosts of teacher conferences past judging her mind, condemning her soul and shaping her into the kind of person the world believed her to be. Each numbingly candid time, those who hath hailed

her and betrayed her chiseled away at the blissful innocence of youth, guiding her lovingly to the realization that God has disfigured us all with imperfections.

Autumn had not passed and yet powerful winter winds made their presence felt in the stampeding rustling of the auburn leaves on the grand old banyan tree towering above the courtyard. The whistling of these gusts could be heard through the shutters of *Building D*, the Language Arts building, erected nearly fifty years ago, as scattered cliques continued to loiter throughout the campus. Many of these students had not attended a teacher conference in years, oftentimes because their parents, or teachers, could not fit it in around busy schedules. Every once in a while, a passerby would peek into Mrs. Gray's classroom oblivious to the deep-seated influence the complexities of a simple meeting could have on a twelve-year-old psyche.

Sophia boldly led her parents into this lair of educational and societal conformity. "Hi, Mrs. Gray!"

A veteran English teacher immediately stopped correcting papers, stood up and briskly engaged the pleasant family of three positioned near her overhead projector. "Hello, I'm Mrs. Gray. Thank you for coming down." Displaying a finely-honed professional smile, the forty-seven-year-old department head and drama club advisor possessing post-graduate degrees in English and education led her guests to a round conference table in the rear of her public school classroom.

"Again, thank you so much for coming down," repeated Mrs. Gray instead of allowing an awkward moment of silence. "I realize it's not so easy for us all to get together like this."

Indeed, it was not easy for the Agapays, not because of scheduling, but because they would be subjected to, one more time, the ugly truth about their daughter's academic shortcomings.

"I realize the timing of this conference is a little unusual," continued Mrs. Gray, "but I wanted to address some concerns, and *high* points, before Christmas break."

"I thought I was doing pretty good so far," blurted Sophia who hoped, just maybe, that middle school would be different.

"I believe that you *are*, in some areas, and not so much, in others," reported Mrs. Gray before shifting eye contact back to the parents. "She's energetic and positive during oral discussions, but loses focus and contributes less on individual and group assignments. Sometimes her homework is turned in unfinished or done improperly, and sometimes, I don't see it at all."

Sophia's mother glared at her almost teenaged daughter. "Hey, you need to turn in your homework *all* the time, okay!"

Sophia looked away with a blank look on her face. "Yeah, I know."

"She does pretty well on shorter reading drills but as they get longer, and more challenging, she starts to lose her place—her concentration. As you can see," showed Mrs. Gray, handing the Agapays Sophia's most recent test, "she does well on lower-level thinking questions requiring *facts* and *details*, but struggles on more advanced problems involving *finding the main idea* and *drawing conclusions*."

"Yes, in elementary school, they thought she might have dyslexia or some kind of learning disability," informed Mr. Agapay.

"Dad, I don't have a learning disability!"

"I've read her file from her previous teachers and, I'm not sure, but going by my observations this semester, I *don't* believe she has a disability—"

"You see, Dad."

"—but her reading comprehension *is* at least one, but more likely two grade levels below where it needs to be. Her NCE, or *normal curve equivalent*, which, like a percentile rank, compares Sophia against her peers, has dropped each of the past five years. Sophia is falling behind."

And that she was. As if a switch had been flipped, Sophia's mind transported her soul away from the teacher conference, escaping this web of disappointment, to the grand old banyan tree towering over the courtyard. The poor little girl fell hopelessly into a rabbit hole, losing more and more of herself in the comfort of her own private wonderland. Perhaps this never, never land was given to Sophia so that she would never, never

have to feel the pain from the limitations God set upon her. This fantasyland was, if not better, safer than drinking, smoking or drugs in this precarious time of physical and psychological transition. Some kids become someone they are not, while others lose themselves in movies, books, music or games. Yet, Sophia was now addicted to this self-induced hallucinogen virtually undetectable to the discerning adults in her life. This precursor to worldliness trapped the innocent, yet now accountable, mind and would soon begin to seduce its host's ripening eternal soul. But, just then, from the idyllic recesses of wonderland, Sophia heard the magic words. Reality's fishhook yanked her from the dream world, and viciously placed her back on trial in the teacher conference.

"You're transferring me to Mr. Johnson's class!" objected Sophia. "But Mr. Johnson teaches—*special education*, doesn't he?"

"Sophia, this is what needs to be done right now," dictated her father.

"The classroom size is *smaller*," assured Mrs. Gray, "and Mr. Johnson will go at a pace that'll allow you to improve your reading skills so you can rejoin us next year."

"Next *year*? Are you serious?" exclaimed Sophia. "All my friends are in your class—including my best friend, Greg."

Mrs. Agapay tried to placate her only child. "Sophia—"

"Will I still be able to audition for the school play in March?" raised Sophia.

"I believe very much that you will," assuaged Mrs. Gray with a half-hearted smile.

Sophia could not help but notice the blatant hesitancy in Mrs. Gray's promise, which produced a sobering feeling of dread in the gut of the wannabe actress. "Maybe this is all part of God's plan," thought Sophia. That very night, Sophia sought confirmation on her hands and knees.

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### **At the Doorstep of Stardom**

Months had passed since the infamous teacher conference. Sophia had been acclimating well to her new remedial level reading class, achieving a *B+* letter grade. But the big day that

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had been circled in red for months on a calendar hanging front and center on a twelve-year-old girl's bedroom wall was finally at hand. Crisp springtime mountain gusts whisked their way into an aspirant's private chambers, rousing a stomach already churning with butterflies. After laboring through most of her homework and watching probably too much television, Sophia would routinely kneel down in prayer to her Lord in gratitude for her family, friends and acting ability, falling asleep soon thereafter. But, tonight, with her chance at glory imminent, Sophia decided to seek counsel from her best friend.

"You know that my parents are not fond of the fact that you're calling after nine thirty on a school night," scolded Greg.

"Thanks for covering for me, dude, and, by the way, this is school related," insisted Sophia.

"You mean thanks for *lying* for you," corrected Greg.

"Right – hey, anyway, I think you'd make a pretty good actor, too," praised Sophia sarcastically. "But you need to work on your delivery, just a bit."

"You know I have a big science test tomorrow, *and* a big English test."

"No, I wouldn't know, because I'm not in the smart reading class anymore. You're just the biggest *nerd* I've ever known."

"And you're just an *outcast*."

"I like my new classmates. They have superior personalities. Our class is much more colorful than Mrs. Gray's."

"So what do you want?" moaned Greg. "Or is this just about my boring personality?"

"You're *not* boring at all," patronized Sophia. "In fact, you're one of the most interesting boys I know. Girls love boys who can talk about all those historical events. I fell in love with you in third grade when you were the first to memorize the entire multiplication table."

"I have *two* very big tests tomorrow that'll have a huge effect on my future career. Well, what do you care?"

"Wow, I loved that delivery – powerful, passionate and straight to the point. By the way, I *do* care. I know you missed your 4.0 last semester because of *one* class, which caused you much pain and sadness –"

"Yeah, very funny," snapped Greg. "You just *had* to bring that up, huh."

"I've been studying hard tonight, too."

"Really."

"I watched a courtroom drama on ABC, which would be good for you, too, because you want to be a lawyer, right?" thought Sophia. "Then I watched a half an hour of a comedy on NBC. And, now, I'm finishing up an R-rated international spy thriller on HBO. *Shhh*—don't tell my parents."

"I going to tell you something, so listen up," directed Greg, "because I'm only going to say this once."

"Okay."

"You're going to be *great* tomorrow, not because of your acting ability, which is awesome to say the least, but because you have a fighting spirit. You just never give up."

"Thanks," responded Sophia, a little choked up. "That was real sweet."

"I want to add that whatever happens tomorrow, you're still going to be a star in my book."

"Well, good luck on your two exams okay, because I know they mean a lot to you. So what time do you plan to—hello, *hello*?" Greg had hung up. "How rude!"

So, once again, it was dead silent in a girl's bedroom with Cinderella still unsure which path her destiny would take the following day. Sophia knelt down in prayer one last time on this night before jumping into bed to fantasize about what God had in store for her.

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### **One Moment in Time**

The big day had arrived. Sophia walked into the office conference room to audition for a role in the upcoming school play. As it had been before, Sophia lost focus and could not recall her lines. Again, a drama teacher had to kindly reject Sophia's request for a role in the play. Again, Sophia had failed in what she so desperately wanted to do. But today, at the end, things would be a little different.

"Sophia," the teacher began. "I can't give you a role in this

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play, because I'm afraid acting is just not your thing. But I know you try so hard so I want to include you in the play."

Upon hearing these words, Sophia's face lit up. "I'll do anything, Mrs. Gray, anything! What do you want me to do? I'll do anything!"

"Well, Sophia," the drama club advisor continued, "your part will come towards the end of the play. In fact, it will come just after it finishes. I want you to walk out into the middle of the stage and thank the audience for attending."

"Mrs. Gray, I thought you wanted me to do something else. Something more to do with the play, maybe? Maybe a side part?"

"Sophia, I'm sorry, but sooner or later someone is going to have to tell you the hard truth. The truth is, Sophia, you're just not born to be an actress. You were born, perhaps, to do something else. To be someone else, okay?"

Sophia felt so hurt deep down in her heart, and wanted to leave the room as quickly as possible before she started crying. "Yes, Mrs. Gray," Sophia managed to say. "Yes, I'll do it."

It was Friday night. The play had just finished and it was time for Sophia to make her entrance on stage. The play was not first-rate, but the parents clapped anyway because it was their children up there performing. It was their children allowed to be stars for one night. In the back, near the exit, Sophia's parents anxiously awaited their daughter's turn.

Sophia was surprised at how nervous she was considering the smallness of her part. She walked on stage under the lights, and began to say what she needed to say. "Ladies and gentlemen, parents and friends, thank you for coming. God bless!"

Most of the crowd had already started to leave even before Sophia spoke her words except two people, seated way in back, their eyes and hearts focused on their daughter's every word.

Sophia became so disheartened after this first and last moment in her short-lived on-stage career that she relinquished all expectations of becoming an actress. Tacks were removed and

posters taken down from walls and disposed of, never to be seen again. Dozens of DVDs occupying space in an overflowing drawer were relocated to a box in a dusty attic. And a special journal, a diary expressly used to log Sophia's climb to stardom, received its last entry:

*This will be the last time I write in this journal. I now admit what I've denied in my heart for a long time. I admit acting is not for me. I pass on my torch to the next dreamer, to the next boy or girl who looks up at a shooting star and makes a wish. May I wish you better luck, but for me, it's time to turn the music off. This sounds so depressing. Well, maybe because it is depressing. It's so quiet in here, in my room. Goodnight.*

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### **Moving On**

*Seven years* had passed. The alarm clock shrieked, its high-pitch tone jarring the eardrums of the sleeping college coed. Sophia's body jolted upwards, thrusting aside a pillow in the process, her right fist pounding the snooze button a split-second later. With adrenaline pumping, the woman of action ejected herself out of bed and readied herself for the crucial day. It was Sunday morning and Sophia needed to put the finishing touches on her preparation for Sunday school. Sophia taught the seven and eight-year-olds at the neighborhood church, and her mind was in a minor state of panic attempting to organize things on this crisp winter morning. Sophia and her Sunday school students were putting together a skit that would be performed just before the start of worship service. Four weeks in the making, this presentation involved the reenactment of the Nativity scene. But several of Sophia's young actors had trouble memorizing dialogue involving compound sentences. Sophia compensated by shortening lines of conversation and simplifying vocabulary for any struggling child.

The seventeen-minute play was a huge success particularly in the minds and hearts of the parents. After worship service, Sophia and her church buddies would patronize the nearby

sushi restaurant. Instead of selecting from a medley of sushi circulating through the establishment, Sophia would choose from among the salmon, teriyaki chicken and combination bentos.

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### **Memoirs of a Dreamer**

It was almost three o'clock when Sophia arrived home, and she noticed it was a little cooler inside her parents' townhouse. A shrill breeze swept through producing a whistling sound. Sophia proceeded to her bedroom and plopped herself atop the sheets, facing the ceiling.

Out of nowhere, a well of nostalgic thoughts descended upon Sophia. The young adult was led to look up into her closet, panning to the shelf at the very top. She saw what looked like a book, her diary of old lying there undisturbed. Untouched. She got up out of her bed and proceeded to the closet. She stretched her body and snagged the diary with her left hand on her tippy-toes. Sophia recalled seven years ago when she had placed the diary in its current location, she needed a stool to reach the shelf.

Sophia held the diary in her left hand and dusted it off with her right. She instinctively flipped to the page where her final entry had been made. It was a time when a young girl had closed a chapter in her life. It was a time when a young girl had given up on a dream. She recalled, like it was yesterday, there had been about five blank pages left when she penned her last punctuation mark.

At that moment, a cold wind infiltrated this private area through partially opened jalousies. This induced an eerie sensation in Sophia, stimulating her spinal nerve endings. Or perhaps it was her spiritual nerve endings.

"Has somebody been reading my diary?" the young adult asked herself. No, it wasn't that. "Someone has been writing in my journal!" But Sophia saw no words, nothing perceptibly written on the last five blank pages, no evidence to corroborate fantastical suspicions floating around in her thoughts. She held the diary nearer to her eyes, closer to her soul, and began to read the invisible words...

### January 1991

*The physical, intellectual and emotional parameters of who Sophia is, of how she walks, of how she learns, of how she sings and of how she smiles, will be fulfilled on this day. Sophia's spirit will be created in the image of God inside the embryo under the protective care of her mother's womb, and linked to Sophia's heart, mind and soul. Her parents will pray many times, but God's answer will remain the same. Sophia will be an only child because a second birth would give rise to life-threatening complications for her mother. Hundreds of prayers and eight years later, they will accept the Lord's answer.*

### July 1997

*As an only child, Sophia will be obliged to entertain herself from the age of five. In her thought patterns, some of her fantasies will be merged with her realities. This fusion will be maximized due to her only child circumstances. The synthesis of fantasy and reality will allow her to transform from innocence, to rage, to levity, to solemnity at the twinkling of an eye. Her facial curves and contours will be exacted to sustain an appearance of transparency and incorruptibility. Actors who endeavor to project these qualities cannot sustain them over time. The act is forced, and will betray the performer and induce irritation in the audience. Her actor's gaze will be natural and penetrating, and she will realize this and nurture it. From this underpinning of innocence, she will branch out into other mood states such as conviction, doubt, eagerness and hope but always rooted in a child-like purity emanating from a soul that belongs to her Creator.*

### April 2000

*Sophia will stumble upon a horror movie being viewed in an uncle's living room at the age of eight. The images will jar her mind and creep into her soul, and combined with pulpit depictions of Hell, linger in her psyche for months. She will not be able to rid herself of these haunting images until she makes a decision. A counseling*

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*session with a school therapist, who moonlights as a youth pastor, will bring her one step closer to knowing her God. On her knees on a blustery Tuesday night four months to the day later, she will invite Jesus Christ into her heart, and her nightmares will fritter away and die. She will discover that fear is a powerful emotion that can rouse people to decisive action. The source of the trepidation will continue to evade her, yet draw her to an assuredness that the fear of Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

### February 2004

*Drama teachers will reject Sophia time and time again. This will escort her to the reality that pleasing the world is a fruitless venture with no gold-filled pot at the end of the rainbow. Positive and negative reviews of her acting ability, or lack thereof, will prompt an aimless search for a satisfaction that does not exist. She will come to an understanding that pleasing her Lord, through the use of her spiritual gifts, will reap infinite rewards as opposed to chasing the accolades of the world, which will be burnt up at the end of time. She will recognize that Jesus critiques the motives of her heart rather than any worldly skill to recite lines of dialogue or any outward ability to falsify moods and patterns of thought. Sophia's Creator will not give her any innate propensity to act. She will not be able to draw from inborn ability to become someone she is not, or conjure up emotion that is not there. Her gifts will come from above and be imparted by disproportionate means directly into her spirit. These gifts will remain mysteries until appointed times.*

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### **Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen**

Sophia closed her diary and held it high on her chest, close to her heart. She had read the words, but would she believe? Would she enter into the city? Into her promised land. As self-doubt crept in, Sophia began to feel afraid. Fear of a past that had brought her disillusionment, and concern over a future that could impinge upon her current comfort zone.

“Are these words real? Is God talking to me? Is He talking

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through my heart and into my soul? Or is this just another fantasy? Of a little girl. In a world of her own.”

Sophia repositioned her diary in her palms, giving it her full attention. She flipped back through her diary, turning back the clock to her last journal entry.

*This will be the last time I write in this journal.*

Yes, it had been the last time Sophia wrote in this journal. But seven years ago when she put away her special diary pen after etching her final log entry, someone else kept on in her absence. Someone who had always been there – creating, planning, inviting. An Inventor who had the authority to permutate DNA base pairs to optimize a dreamer’s chances of becoming a movie star but did not. Sophia had locked her journal, but her Savior has the keys to her heart. She had exited the realm of fantasy and was now at the doorstep of faith.

*I now admit what I’ve denied in my heart for a long time. I admit acting is not for me.*

Was acting not for Sophia? Was this the apt way to think? Should the doubter have arrived at the conclusion that acting was not for her, or relinquished a resolve not in accordance with the Lord’s will? In either case, the Holy Spirit was encouraged by emergent specks of maturity in Sophia’s heart, and burgeoning bits of gracefulness in her spirit. Sophia was accurate in feeling the denial in her heart, but God had sweeping plans for her as far as acting was concerned.

*I pass on my torch to the next dreamer, to the next boy or girl who looks up at a shooting star and makes a wish. May I wish you better luck but for me, it’s time to turn the music off.*

For any Christian, even a beleaguered Christian, the music is

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never turned off. Never silenced. In the darkest of times, when your spirit is worn down, you can faintly hear it. The hushed lullaby in the wind, Jesus loves you, this you know. Sophia had thrown her torch aside onto the Earth, its flame flickering in the wind, breathing its last breath. But before the evil one could snuff out the last flickering flame, the Lord raised the piece of wood, and breathed into it a roaring fire.

*This sounds so depressing. Well, maybe because it is depressing. It's so quiet in here, in my room. Good night.*

And it was depressing. In the quiet of Sophia's bedroom. A quitter switching off her nightlight and laying afloat her dream in the waves, adrift ad infinitum in directionless waters. A young performer throwing in the towel without consulting her Manager. Her Creator. Her Savior. Her God who had the means and intention to transform her into something very special. A special girl under the lights.

Sophia suspended herself in time for a moment, long enough for the expectations and imaginings of a girl, of a past, to converge with the actualities and responsibilities of a woman, of a destiny. Next, Sophia hunted for it inside drawers, under class notes and behind cellular phone bills. At last she found it, her special diary pen with enough ink for a few more entries. Then she began to write in her journal. Deciding to reopen the past. Resolving to fulfill Divine providence.

*Dear Diary,*

*Guess what? It's me again! How about that? It's been 7 years. A long 7 years! It's been so long these yellowish-green things were growing on the cover. Gross! I had to bust out the heavy-duty cleaning stuff. These words, these last words, I can't believe I wrote them. My goodness, they sound so pathetic. You know what? I really needed these last 7 years. It was during this time that God gave me clarity I could not have received in any other way...*

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### God Handpicked You For My Life

It was a time of new beginnings. A more mature young Christian woman with psychological baggage, yet still a girl at heart, exited the shielded confines of her dream world, and charged into the unknown frontier to put together the pieces of her life's puzzle. Her heart could now feel the lovingly disciplinarian companionship of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside her, upholding her righteousness and condemning her ungodliness. Yet, somehow, she had always known the passion of her Christ because of His early invitation and her acceptance, as her Lord guided, punished, uplifted and grounded an immature spirit. The Holy Ghost was now calling Sophia to find that other soul who would hold her hand during promotion to the next temporal level of an Eternal plan. Sophia could see with her faith's eye her Creator looking in from outside the physical universe, lovingly frustratingly withholding moments of time until the right moment in time.

It was but hours past sunrise. Sophia did not know exactly where she was driving or to whom she needed to talk to, but she now had the conviction that her destination was upon a pathway of the Divine. She arrived at the office building so miniature that it needed no elevator, and made her way to the unit to meet her role model handpicked by God.

"Mrs. — Gray!" stammered a stunned Sophia. "Wow, I — uh — did not expect to see — how are you?"

"I know that *voice*," determined the fifty-four-year-old retired English teacher with the warmest smile, "and I'm sure I know that *face*."

"It's me — *Sophia*. Sophia Agapay."

"Yes, I remember you very well. It's been, what, seven or eight years? Look at you — all grown up! And who was that friend of yours who won that award?"

"That would be Greg."

"Yes, Greg!"

"He won that *Most Likely To Succeed* thing," evoked Sophia. "I still hang out with that guy. He's taking pre-law classes."

"And, if I recall, you won a *spirit award* yourself."

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"Yeah, I was voted *class clown*."

"Yes, yes, I remember. You were so lively. You made our class so much fun."

"For *half* a year."

"Yes, we had that parent conference," recollected Mrs. Gray, her voice less animated. "I may have broke my promise to you."

"It's okay," forgave Sophia. "But I *did* try real hard to rejoin your class."

"This can't be a coincidence."

"I'm here to take lessons—*acting* lessons. Your Internet ad says you offer acting lessons."

"Yes, it does," corroborated Mrs. Gray feebly.

"You don't want to take me."

Mrs. Gray could not find the right words. "No, it's just that. It's just that I was so disappointed—"

"I know that you were *disappointed*, but that was a long time ago."

"No, Sophia. For a long time—for so many years I was disappointed that you *listened* to me. Now, please, take your seat."

This unexpected meeting with her former judge, jury and acting dream executioner stirred up memories in Sophia of her personal Dark Ages she has tried so hard to forget. It was an occasion when a hypercritical teacher indiscriminately imposed her callousness upon an impressionable young soul, forever branding a "scarlet letter" upon a vulnerable ego. Mrs. Gray remembered a girl with a learning disability. God ordained a saint with a fighting spirit. Without hesitation, Sophia signed contract papers for acting lessons, endorsing the authority who had once condemned her.

"You're going to have to learn some things about me before we get started."

"Yes, Mrs. Gray."

"You must be wondering why there aren't any drama awards or pictures on these bare white walls?"

"You're a humble lady? You don't like to show off?"

"There's really nothing to hang up. I minored in *theater* in college. I loved it. But then it all stopped. Nothing came of it. The

next thing I knew, I was a middle school English teacher. And, now, here I am." The former drama club advisor skimmed through her former student's resume. "I see you're majoring in *liberal arts*. I thought it'd be *theatre*."

"At some point, I woke up and realized I'd have to pay the bills."

"Or perhaps you knew, deep down inside, that there was only *one* Person you could depend on, and that Person has and will give you all you'll ever need."

"That could very well be true."

"Did you perform in *plays* in high school?"

"No, I ran cross-country and danced for one year."

Mrs. Gray tilted her head down and took a deep breath.

"There are generally *two* kinds of teachers – those who *love* teaching and those who *hate* teaching, and many don't show it. Those who don't know must get out, because they can do irreparable harm. But if you're *not* a particularly good teacher, perhaps because of inexperience, but you *love* teaching, you can do monumental good."

"You're going to tell me which category I'm in."

"You, my dear, are *beyond* categorization. Artistic and academic ability is irrelevant. God limits us all in those categories. But perhaps if you had not been categorized as you were, your greatest spiritual gifts – toughness and resiliency – would not have blossomed as they did.

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### **Developing Her Other Spiritual Gifts**

Master Mrs. Gray and padawan Sophia marched into the neighborhood minimum-security **nursing home** for Sophia's first major test in acting class.

"We're going to train *here*, Mrs. Gray? Do you have friends or relatives here?"

"Are you questioning my judgment, young lady?"

"Absolutely not, Mrs. Gray!"

"Your assignment, should you should to accept it, is to go up to these nice folk and using these parameters –," ordered Mrs. Gray, handing Sophia an instruction sheet, "make them