

THE JOURNEY BEGINS WITHIN OURSELVES AND...

THURSDAYS IN THE GROTTO

A scenic landscape featuring a rocky hillside with sparse trees and a large, faint, glowing angelic figure in the background. The figure is positioned on the left side of the image, appearing to emerge from a misty or ethereal atmosphere. The overall tone is inspirational and spiritual.

AN INSPIRATIONAL STORY OF COMING THROUGH THE FIRE

R. GLENN KELLY

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T HURSDAYS
IN THE
G ROTTO

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R. GLENN KELLY

THURSDAYS
IN THE GROTTO

For my late son, Jonathan Taylor Kelly.

For many years your loving spirit has played out *Thursdays in the Grotto* within my heart and mind. Finally, I put heart to paper when you came to me and spoke:

*“My words are like a ship, and the sea is their meaning.
Come to me and I will take you to the depths of spirit.
I will meet you there.”*

- Rumi

LOOKING BEYOND THE ILLUSION

“Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs...then shall you truly dance.”

~ Kahlil Gibran

With no time to brace for landing, Aiden’s rump hits the steeply inclined slope well before his feet come down in front of him. The hill’s drop is so sharp, in fact, that if not for his pack, he’d probably be sliding down on his back instead of his butt. He tries desperately to dig his heels into the earth to stop his slide, while grasping at tree trunks and limbs that pass by with increasing velocity. Just below, and coming up fast, he sees nothing. There are no trees and no more hillside in his path. He knows this means he’s approaching a drop-off. How much of a drop is unknown at the time, but unless he can stop himself, he’s about to find out. Just as his legs go over the edge, he manages to spin onto his stomach. Digging his boots into the vertical wall below, he grabs for anything that might stop the rest of his body from going over. Unable to get a good hold, however, he free falls twenty-five feet to the hard surface below and lands with a heavy thud on his backpack.

Dazed but alive, Aiden lies still for a few minutes while the air re-enters his lungs. As his thoughts also begin to return, he does a little

injury evaluation by moving his arms and legs about. Grateful and satisfied, he slowly stands, removes his pack and looks around. He's on a level stone that juts out from the mountainside in an almost perfect semicircle. Walking out to the edge, he looks down to find there's no cliffside wall below. He's landed on a table rock and realizes there's no climbing down. Not only that, the climb back up the sheer cliff behind him requires a rope, at least, which he doesn't exactly have at the moment. Nor is there any viable chance a wayward hiker might come along in such a remote area. Pulling his mobile phone from his pocket, he's not surprised to find the *No Signal* message on his screen, and Aiden realizes he's in trouble. But he's been in trouble a lot lately. That's why he came to Mother Mountain, after all. It was time for a transformation and one way or another she's going to give it to him.

While still at the rock's edge, Aiden takes another look down. He wonders if he'd have to jump if that big old beast of a bear finds him and is dumb enough to blindly plunge over the upper cliff in hot pursuit? He's certainly not going out by being eaten by a bear. No sir! Maybe he'd be able to grab the attacking bear and pull them both over the ledge to their mutual deaths below? At least when their remains were discovered, people would know Aiden Huff died in a fight, right? But what if he just took a step forward right now? Would it really be so bad? The only other option, it seems, is to hang out on this barren rock, exposed to the high mountain elements, and eventually starve to death. No! He's not going out that way either. If it came to that, he might just have to take a little slip over the edge and leave everyone believing it was nothing more than a hiking accident. But, if it came to that, at least there would be no more pain and grief, and no one would think he was a weak coward. It was an accident. If it came to that, at least he wouldn't be missing his wife and son anymore, would he? Nor would he be angry any longer about losing his job if it came to that. If it came to that, he wonders, would it really be so bad?

“TAKE THE STEP, AIDEN HUFF. IF THAT IS THY WILL,” suddenly erupts a deep, loud, echoey voice that seems to come from everywhere around Aiden.

Startled, Aiden spins around. When he does, his left foot slides off the edge and he falls to his face with his legs precariously dangling over the table rock’s rim. Furiously pumping his knees and clawing with his hands, he pulls himself to a safe distance and stands. Looking around and up the cliffside, he sees no one and turns back to the edge.

“IF YOU ARE READY TO TAKE THE STEP, AIDEN HUFF, THEN IT IS THINE OWN WILL,” again comes the loud, commanding voice from nowhere and everywhere.

Wondering if the fall had knocked some silliness into his head, Aiden decides to sarcastically answer the voice by yelling back, **“SO, YOU WANT ME TO END IT, HUH? YOU WANT ME TO STOP MY PAIN? I’LL DO IT, YOU KNOW? IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT? ARE YOU HERE TO HELP ME DIE?”**

“No, Aiden Huff,” comes the same voice, minus the deep, echoing tone. “I am here to help you live.”

Scanning the area for the source of the voice, Aiden notices the limbs of several bushes and vines at the base of the cliff wall behind him separating on their own. As they do, the figure of a large man steps forth from the dark opening and deliberately walks forward to stand beside him. Looking down over the ledge for just a moment and then back to Aiden, the man matter-of-factly states, “That is a rather long drop. I am delighted your will was not to take the step. I am afraid, Aiden Huff, your body would not have survived such a fall.”

Still confused by the appearance, Aiden intently studies the man before him on the rock. He’s about as big, if not slightly bigger than he is, and from his fervent studies of American heritage, distinctly of Cherokee Indian lineage. What momentarily piques his curiosity is the man’s attire, or lack thereof. He’s shirtless, with only a bright red and

white checkered cloth wrapped around his waist that's almost long enough to hide his bare feet.

"And just who are you?" asks Aiden.

"I am life. I am essence. I am spirit made in the image of the Creator."

"You mean, like an angel?" Aiden smugly asks while brushing dirt and pebbles off his sleeves.

"No. However, I could be an angel if I so desired. But for now, my chosen path is to exist and grow in unconditional love simply as spirit."

Aiden slightly chuckles, points at the man's legs, and says, "So, I guess spirits are really Native Americans dressed in Italian restaurant tablecloths. Who knew? Do you have a name, spirit?"

"No. I am a part of the One who has only briefly departed. Names are only necessary when we incarnate in human form. However, as that is somewhat the case now, you may use the name Dan if that is your will."

"Dan, huh? *And* you don't find that name to be just a little, well, lame for a spirit who could be an angel if he wanted? You couldn't come up with something just a bit more ethereal than that, *Dan*?"

Dan softly smiles and replies, "I offer you the customary name of the mortal man who stands before you now. Through God's grace and consent, I have temporarily subdued the spirit that manifests within and embodied myself for divine purposes."

With more sarcasm than skepticism, Aiden says, "Look. I didn't think I hit my head when I fell, fella, but I musta, huh? This is crazy. I'm not even sure where I am right now. But how 'bout you just tell me how I can climb my happy butt up outta here?"

"You are not sure if my words are true, Aiden Huff. But I understand how you do not yet believe."

As hysterical laughter mixes with words, Aiden answers, “Believe? You’re kiddin’ me right now, right? Wouldn’t you agree this is all just a bit, uh, what’s the word? Crazy? Yeah? That’s it. Crazy. Well, you *could* do something to move me, brother. Make it rain. No? Manifest me a step ladder up that cliff, then. Too easy? How ‘bout beaming down a band of angels to play Stairway to Heaven? Now that right there might just make a believer outta me, pal!”

“Calm yourself, Aiden Huff. You have a tendency to become excited when faced with that which you believe is not possible. You must work on expanding your beliefs. Or at least your patience.”

Aiden turns away and scoffs before turning back to say, “You gotta give me something here, pal. This is way beyond believable.”

“Your name is Aiden John Huff, son of Quinn and Margarete Huff, who have both rejoined me in spirit. Wonderful souls, both of them. You have a younger brother and sister. Twins. Teddy and Jessica. Your given name, Aiden, was your father’s homage to Aiden Joseph Huff, a German immigrant who, long ago, first settled your family in these mountains. You married your high-school sweetheart, Molly Anne Kilgore, and she would give birth to a wonderful child you would name Ian Taylor Huff.”

“That’s it?” snaps Aiden in an exasperated tone. “You spend a little time in the county record hall and you wanna spew that garbage to get over on me? It ain’t gonna happen, spirit-man. This’s gotta end. Now! So, get on with it and tell me what your deal is here. Whaddya want?”

Dan looks to the ground for several seconds, looks back at Aiden with a gentle smile and compassionately responds, “You wet your bed until you were seven years of age. Your dear mother helped you hide your bedsheets, and your shame, from your father. You killed an innocent robin with your new pellet rifle when you were eleven and became physically sickened from taking a life just for the purpose of

killing. At fourteen, you went to the large retail centers in the town of Abingdon with Frankie Jones and his mother. There, you concealed a cigar lighter you thought would please your father as a gift. However, you would hold such guilt, fear, and anxiety in the theft that you eventually threw the item into a pond and made a pledge to never break the law again. At eighteen, you enlisted in the armed services after you backed down from a fight with two vulgar and intoxicated farmhands in the town feed store. When you found out that they molested a young woman later that same day, you vowed to become a *fighter for good*, as you have often referred to yourself privately throughout adulthood.”

Having been struck by the deeply personal and secret insights coming from this strange man, Aiden had already dropped to his knees before Dan finished and is beginning to feel tears welling in his eyes. “Enough, please. Enough,” he pleads as he painfully looks up at Dan. “If you know all this, then you know *all* the shameful things about me I’ve always kept from others.”

“No, Aiden Huff. These things and others are not at all shameful. You have truly lived a life where your past has positively shaped your future. And your choices, both noble and poor, shaped a virtuous life where you are the same man when alone as when with others in a crowd.”

“Well, I’m sorry for bein’ so snarky before,” Aiden says with true sincerity before a lightbulb suddenly fires up in his head. “But, hey, I gotta ask...well, heck, if you are who you say you are, then you probably already know what I’m gonna ask anyway, right?”

Dan reaches down and takes Aiden by the shoulders to help him to his feet and responds, “Yes, Aiden Huff. If I am spirit and can depart from the One and come before you, can Ian do the same? The answer is yes. Ian is actually before you now. But you, Aiden Huff, are not ready to see or even recognize the spirit of your son. When you are ready, you will see him.”

BIO

R. Glenn Kelly, or Ron to his family and friends, is a bereaved father, as well as an award-winning author and speaker. His past books include; *Sometimes I Cry in the Shower*, *The Griefcase*, *Grief Healings 365*, and *Grief in the Workplace*. After losing his sixteen-year-old son and only child to a rare congenital heart defect, Ron struggled with grief and his own identity. As he found healthful ways to move forward, he would publish his first book, *Sometimes I Cry in the Shower*, and become a highly sought-after Keynote Speaker and Workshop Presenter for several national bereavement support organizations, churches, universities, Fortune 50 companies, and more.

Speaking on the topic of grief healing, Ron has appeared as a guest on numerous television talk shows, radio programs, podcasts, and in newsprint articles. He has served as a National Board of Directors member for multiple national bereavement support organizations and a Board of Advisors member at Le Bonheur Children's Hospital in Memphis, TN, where his son passed away. Considered a Subject Matter Expert on the diversities between male and female grief, he enjoys conducting couples' workshops for parents who have experienced child loss.

When not involved in his favorite pastime of writing, Ron speaks at local civic organizations, churches, and businesses to bring greater attention to the impacts of grief in the workplace, both to the bereft and to their employer. His books can be found in print, ebook and audiobook at most online retailers, as well as bookstores everywhere. To find out more about R. Glenn Kelly, or to book him for speaking events, please visit <https://rglenmkelly.com>.

THURSDAYS IN THE GROTTO

You've been there. At some point, maybe even now, the bottom just dropped out of your life. When Appalachian Game Warden Aiden Huff loses his son, his deep despondency brings on an avalanche of other tragedies, taking with it his job, his life-long friends, and even his dear wife. But raised as a child of the hills, Aiden knows the spirit of Mother Mountain can make or break a man, so he sets out to accept either fate in her arms.

When his journey takes him to a hallowed grotto off the highest trails, he encounters another wayward traveler hiding from the world. It's a good thing God placed a spark of salvation alongside this lost soul. Will it be enough to not only redeem this evil spirit but also guide our Aiden in rediscovering a life of faith, peace and purpose? Spoiler Alert; God never fails!

But please watch out for the bears, federal agents, cougars, helicopters, horses, nosy town folk, and so much more Aiden must cross to keep the sacred grotto and its sojourners a secret. For him, however, they might all play a role in the spiritual journey that could become his destination. Come find out all that Aiden discovers about life and unconditional love during his Thursdays in the Grotto.

R. Glenn Kelly is a bereaved father, having lost his sixteen-year-old son and only child to a rare heart defect. He is the author of other award-winning books about coming through the fire, including *SOMETIMES I CRY IN THE SHOWER*. He has appeared on national television, including Trinity Broadcast Network, on-going radio shows, and provided Keynote Addresses and workshops on personal recovery at Fortune Fifty companies, international non-profit organizations, universities, hospitals, churches, civic organizations and more.



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