



FICTION BY TERRY MILLER SHANNON

Secret Ingredient

**“GREAT BIKE,
GINA!” I SAID.**

Looking at her glowing face, I could almost be happy for her. Almost forget that all my friends had new things. All except me.

“Thanks,” she said, grinning.

I took off, following Gina on Dad’s old piece-of-junk, more-or-less-green bike. “Jessica,” she called, “have you seen Yuki’s new jacket? It’s awesome!”

I avoided looking at my old hand-me-down. It had been passed through two sisters in one family, on to my cousin Vi, who had finally

given it to me. “A jacket with a history,” Dad called it.

As I pedaled along, I was keeping score: Gina, one new bike. Jessica, zip. Yuki, one new jacket. Jessica, zip. Even Chuckie next door had gotten a new name—Charles. And my baby sister Willow had two new teeth.

Did I want a new name or new teeth? No. On the other hand, did I want a new bike or a new jacket? Only with every fiber of my being.

When I got home, Dad was in

“SO, JESS, HOW’S MY FAMOUS

Secret Ingredient

MEAT LOAF?” DAD ASKED.

the kitchen, breaking eggs into a big yellow bowl. “How was school?” he asked.

“Okay. What are you making?”

“Meat loaf.”

“What did you put in it?”

“Everything—including the secret ingredient,” he said, grinning. “Bet you can’t guess what it is!”

“Salt?” He shook his head.

“Garlic?”

“Nope,” he said. “It’s something invisible—but wonderful!”

All of a sudden, while I watched Dad squoosh raw meat loaf, anger licked through me like fire. *He* was the reason I couldn’t have a new bike or a new jacket! If only Dad had a job—

Mom came in the door then. She told us about her day at work. So I kind of forgot to be mad.

But when we were holding hands for grace, and Dad started thanking God for all our many blessings, I got mad again. *All our many blessings? Right. Excuse me?*

“So, Jess, how’s my famous secret-ingredient meat loaf?” Dad asked.

I glared at the meat on my plate. It was yummy. But somehow, I didn’t feel like giving Dad any compliments. I shrugged. “Okay.”

“Admit it! It’s fantastic! My secret ingredient is the key.”

“Gina has a new bike. It’s awesome,” I blurted out. “Your old bike is terrible! I’m embarrassed to be seen on it.”

“We can’t afford to buy you a new bike, Jess.”

“We can’t afford *anything* anymore!” I was mad—but I didn’t care. “You told me God would take care of our family!”

Dad said, “I was right too. We’re rich in what counts, Jessie.”

“That old bike is going to be in pieces one of these days.” That was my exit line, as I left the table.

After school, Yuki said, “Let’s ride down to the beach.”

“I’ll go get my bike,” I said.

Dad waved at me from the garden.

“Hey, Dad!” I called. “We’re going to ride our bikes down to the beach, okay?”

“Uh-oh,” he said. “Remember how you said the bike was going to be in pieces one of these days?”

I wrinkled my forehead.

“It is,” he said. “I—”

But I didn’t let him finish.

“Thanks a heap, Dad.” I went to tell Yuki I couldn’t go.

“Canned chili?” Mom asked at dinner.

Dad said, “I got involved with another project.”

The whole next morning, I avoided Dad. Which was easy, because he was out tinkering in the garage. When he came inside, he was grinning. I pretended I didn’t see him. But the more I worked at punishing Dad, the more punished I felt.

Early in the afternoon, the doorbell rang.

“Yuki!” I said, when I swung the door open. “And Gina! What’s up?”

Yuki’s rainbow braces flashed. “Your dad called us and said you’d probably like to go riding.

“Uh, sure,” I said. Bike riding?

Dad knew that his old bike was in pieces! What had gotten into him? “I’ll be right back,” I said.

I could hear Gina and Yuki playing patty-cake with Willow as I stomped off to tell Dad a thing or two about practical jokes. About taking care of the family. About God’s blessings.

I jerked the door open. Dad looked up from the bike.

“Dad—” I started and then the words died.

There was the bike! It was sparkly purple, with a beautiful gold design snaking down the back bumper. Multi-colored streamers flowed from the handlebars.

“Like it?” Dad asked. “I thought it was time to fix it up. I took it apart, oiled it—”

I managed to speak through the lump in my throat. “Like it? I love it!” Gratitude soared through me, filling my soul. In a minute, I’d be hugging Dad, thanking him—and apologizing. While I’d been mean to Dad, he’d been taking care of me. I knew without a doubt that his love forgave me.

Love—invisible and wonderful! Now I knew Dad’s *Secret Ingredient!*

I decided, right then, that the next time Dad prayed about our many blessings, I was going to chime in. On second thought—why wait? ✨



BY DESIGN

BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

BY MARILYN SOMMERER

One Bible translation calls this creature “amazing.” Another terms it “wonderful.” What creature is so wonderfully amazing that the Scripture writer finds it beyond his understanding? Answer? The eagle in the air (Prov. 30:18-19).

Because of its size (many have wingspans of 6-8 feet) and its speed (40–100 miles per hour), the eagle creates a graceful sight, swooping down to catch its prey. Eagles feed on fish, other birds, small mammals, and snakes. Their powerful talons make short work of their victims. Their eyesight is superior. If humans had such vision, we could read a newspaper from across a football field!

The courtship flight of eagles is beautiful. A male and female lock talons and free-fall until they release their hold and begin life as a couple. After mating, they stay together for a lifespan of 30 to 50 years.

Many choose to build their homes in tall pines or high on rocky cliffs. The nests are made of large sticks and lined with leaves and grass. They're used year after year, with some annual additions. A record-setting Bald Eagle's nest was 20 feet deep, 10 feet wide, and weighed two tons!

The female lays only one or two eggs every couple of years. Both parents feed the babies after they're hatched. Some varieties fly off on their own after four months. Others take longer.

A fledgling being carried on its mother's wings is a beautiful sight in the air. Scripture uses it as an example of how the Lord delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. He told Moses, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4).

All in all, it's not surprising that the writer in Proverbs found the eagle beyond his understanding. Perhaps we take God too much for granted. We need to ask what our Creator had in mind for us when He created such a variety of wildlife. We can learn from the tiny ant (Prov. 6:6). How much more we can learn from the mighty eagle!



Illustration by Kathy Kelleher



CONNECT

BY DAVE SKIVER

“NOW THEREFORE, STAND AND SEE THIS GREAT THING, WHICH THE LORD WILL DO BEFORE YOUR EYES.”
1 SAMUEL 12:16

My mom often tells the story about the day she heard me, at age two, screaming behind the house where railroad tracks ran nearby. Somehow I had squeezed through the back fence and was heading for the tracks. But unknown to me, a rushing train

had just rounded the distant curve. Suddenly, I jerked to a stop. Prince, our German Shepherd,

had sunk his teeth firmly into the seat of my pants.

Boy, did I scream in complaint! I wanted to have fun in that new “play” area, but the louder I complained, the tighter Prince held me. When my mom saw me, she leaped the fence (despite the fact that she would soon give birth to my twin brothers) and swooped me into her protective arms.

It’s easy to complain, especially when we don’t get what we want. But the next time you feel like complaining about the way things are going, consider this: God just might be protecting you from unseen danger. As these Scripture passages tell us, getting what we want is not always best for us.

- **MONDAY:** Genesis 3:1-7
- **TUESDAY:** Genesis 3:14-19
- **WEDNESDAY:** 1 Samuel 8:1-11
- **THURSDAY:** 1 Samuel 8:12-22
- **FRIDAY:** 1 Kings 21:1-7
- **SATURDAY:** 1 Kings 21:8-19

SPARK



Activities to jumpstart your brain

Match-Up

BY O. J. ROBERTSON

Well-known objects mentioned in the Bible are listed in column one. A person associated with each object is named in column two. Can you put correct pairs together?

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| 1. Sling _____ | A. Joseph |
| 2. Ark _____ | B. Wise Men |
| 3. Trumpet _____ | C. Gabriel |
| 4. Coat _____ | D. Solomon |
| 5. Ladder _____ | E. David |
| 6. Rod _____ | F. Noah |
| 7. Temple _____ | G. Aaron |
| 8. Gifts _____ | H. Jacob |



Illustration by Tony Griego

Answers:

1. E; 2. F; 3. C; 4. A; 5. H; 6. G; 7. D; 8. B

J

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