

## ***A Story for Children: The Rose-colored Glasses***

*Psalm 23; Matthew 7:1-5*

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Once upon a time – actually it was just last week – three children sat on a patio beside some lilac bushes discussing what they would do that day.

There was Violet the oldest who was ten. She was tall and had strawberry blond hair. Her brother Jesse was eight. He had lots of freckles on his face. And their cousin Ben who lived next door was nine. He had brown hair and was fast and really good at sports.

They all went to General Breckenridge Elementary School just a two-minute walk away, but it was summer vacation, it was hot, and there was a sickness everywhere.

They lived in the little village of Fincastle, Virginia, population 438, and because Fincastle was safe and quiet and small, their parents let them walk or ride their bikes anywhere in town, as long as they stayed far away from 220, a dangerous highway full of big scary fast trucks hauling wood chips to the papermill in Covington.

Because of the sickness, the summer was different. Which mostly meant it had been boring. Violet kept suggesting family activities. Let's go to Craig's Creek and swim. Let's go inner tubing on the Cowpasture River. Let's go camping at the Devil's Marbleyard.

"Camping," her mother laughed. "You and your rose-colored glasses. Don't you know we are having a heat wave and a pandemic, and the woods are full of mosquitoes, gnats, ticks, and chiggers. Camping! What a notion. I'm staying home in my air-conditioning thank you very much."

Violet's mother had often mentioned those rose-colored glasses. "You and your rose-colored glasses!" It seemed to be something about how her mother thought her great idea was a bad idea, but that was her mother's opinion.

Violet really liked to go to church, and because of the sickness, church was closed. She said to Ben and Jesse, "Since church is closed from the sickness, how about we have our own church service? We can make our own church in the woods."

The three children actually spent a lot of time in the woods – despite the mosquitoes, gnats, chiggers, ticks, and poison ivy. There was a big woods right behind the Presbyterian Church, and it was owned by Violet's Uncle George, and Uncle George said they could play back there anytime they wanted to.

As they walked up the hill toward the church, they saw Rev. Moss's car parked in the church parking lot. "Hey," said Jesse. "Let's go talk to Rev. Moss. He must be in his office."

They were not allowed to come into the church because of the sickness, so they threw pinecones up at Rev. Moss's window. He opened the window looking down at them.

"Well, it's Jesse, Ben and Violet. So good to see you."

"Good to see you too, Rev. Moss," said Ben. "We miss you."

"I miss you too," said the minister. "I'm tired of this sickness."

"We're going to have our own church service in the woods," said Jesse. "Do you want to come?"

"Better not," said Rev. Moss. "I get poison ivy just looking at it. Horrible rash. Bubbles on my skin. Oozing nasty stuff. One time it got so bad I had to go to the doctor and get a shot!"

"None of us get it," said Violet. "Not even our parents. We can rub it on our arms, and nothing happens."

“Lucky,” said Rev. Moss. “Very lucky. So tell me about your worship service. What are you going to do?”

Violet suddenly realized she had no plan. “We are still deciding,” said Violet. “Do you have any ideas?”

“You could make a Jesus window,” said Rev. Moss. “I read about it in a book and it sounds pretty cool.”

“Tell us,” said Violet.

“Well, you get a shovel and dig a little hole. Then you put things in the hole like a cross or a Bible or a picture of Jesus or other Bible pictures like Noah’s Ark or Moses and the Ten Commandments. And then you get a piece of clear plastic and make a window over the top of the hole and then you lie on your stomach and look through the window.”

“Hmm,” said Violet. That wasn’t really what she had in mind. But to be polite she said, “Thanks we’ll consider it.”

“Well,” said Rev. Moss. “You should read the Bible. Hey, I’ve got one of those little Gideon Bibles that fit in your pocket. It has the New Testament and some of the Psalms. I’ll throw it down to you.”

It was dark green and tiny. “I suggest Psalm 23 and Matthew 7:1-5,” said the minister.

His phone rang in his office and he said goodbye.

They went into the woods where they had a little hideout, a kind of fort with a circle of stones and old rusty patio chairs to sit in. There were lots and lots of ferns, and violet saw on TV a show all about ferns and ferns only grow where the air is pure and clean, and if you take a deep breath beside the ferns it will give you energy.

Violet read them the Bible verses. First *Psalms 23*. She liked the idea of being led beside still waters and restoring her soul, but she wasn't quite sure what a restored soul looked like.

She read *Matthew 7* about not judging others so God won't judge you. Take the log out of our own eye before you ask your friend to take the speck out of hers.

"Do I need to explain the meaning of this to you?" asked Violet.

"Yes," said the boys.

"Don't criticize someone for some tiny little fault or mistake. Instead be honest about your own big faults."

"You mean," Jesse asked, "like when you got all mad at me for leaving a few peanut shells on top of your Harry Potter book and there your whole room is a big ugly filthy mess all the time?"

Violet had to agree that yes that was a good example.

"That's my log, and the peanut shells is your speck. Sorry about that."

Violet said she wanted to try sitting beside the still waters they read about in *Psalms 23*. And they knew just where to go. There was a little pond behind their school, and almost no one knew about it. It was hidden behind a thicket of Bamboo.

They went to the pond and sat there. Violet got out the little Bible Rev. Moss gave them and read *Psalms 23* again. "*The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.*"

They sat quietly for about ten minutes. Violet stood up and stretched.

"I do think I feel my soul is restored."

"What does it feel like?" asked Ben.

"I feel peaceful. I feel like God is here with me. I feel happy and calm."

“I don’t feel any different, said Jesse. “But I do feel hungry. Can we go home now and get some lunch?”

After lunch, they went to the pharmacy. Violet had another idea. Because of the sickness, they had to put masks on their faces when they went into the store. Mr. Makewell, the owner, was there.

“Mr. Makewell,” asked Violet, “Do you sell any rose-colored glasses?”

Mr. Makewell chuckled. “Rose-colored glasses. Well, let me see. I think I do have some sunglasses that have a kind of rose tint to them. They never sold, so I put them in a box in the back. Let me go see if I can find them.”

In a minute he came back with three pair of sunglasses with a sort of pinkish roseish color to the lenses. They tried them on, and everything looked rose colored.

“Cool,” said Ben.

“Awesome,” said Jesse.

“How much?” asked Violet.

“Oh, no charge. I was going to throw them out eventually like I said, no one ever bought them. People like the polarized kind with a green or yellow color. These aren’t very popular.”

“Thank you, Mr. Makewell,” they all said.

“Why did you want these rose-colored glasses?” asked Ben.

“You’ll see,” she said. “But you have to wait until close to dark.”

They went back home, had some ice cream, took a nap, and watched an old *Dialing for Dollars* black and white movie about a woman who comes to live in a spooky mansion with her new husband and her life is full of disturbing surprises.

As it was getting dark, Violet, Jesse, and Ben told their parents they were going to the top of Cemetery Hill to watch the sun go down.

“Oh, you and your rose-colored glasses,” her mother said again. “It won’t be any cooler up there tonight. It’s still hot as a fox and the gnats will be awful. But go ahead. Good riddance.”

In the tiny village of Fincastle, Virginia, there is in fact a cemetery that rises sharply behind the Methodist Church, and from the top you can see the whole village below – the Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches. The county courthouse, the bank, the law offices, the old jail, and the post office. To the east one can see the Peaks of Otter and the Blue Ridge and to the west the Alleghany Mountains.

At the top they sat on a bench and faced west toward the setting sun. Despite Violet’s mother’s pessimistic predictions there was a lovely breeze and no bugs, and it was nice and cool.

“Now,” said Violet, “look around you. Isn’t everything lovely?”

“Very nice,” said Jesse.

“Now,” she instructed, “put on your rose-colored glasses.”

They put on their sunglasses. The white floating clouds turned pink. The sun turned from gold to a new color hard to describe. The birds flying by – typical black crows or brown sparrows, became tropical and exotic in appearance. A bluebird turned to indigo, iridescent, shimmering, luminous.

“This is what I am thinking,” said Violet quietly, slowly.

“When we pay attention, when we stop and slow down and really look at things, we can see them as God wants us to see them. Kind of better or more beautiful, like wearing rose-colored glasses.”

They say there in silence for a long time, peaceful and happy, watching the sky, the clouds, the birds, the wind moving the branches in the cedar trees, the strange colored sun going down until it disappeared behind the rose colored mountains, turning magenta, peach, fuchsia, lavender, and orchid against the stars and the moon.