

TOP
of the
MOUNTAIN
a story about real love

Wade J. Carey



A mid-morning autumn breeze exhaled dry wisps of summer's final breath upon the lovely hamlet of Cottondale. The amazing tranquility of this rural landscape was ironically, its most distinct feature. This sleepy little north Texas town—a mere forty miles northwest of Ft. Worth—lollygagged through another one of its stunningly bucolic days.

On this gentle morning, ten year old Rachel Green sat under a huge shade tree on the west side of Jerry's General Store, near the center of the community. The store sat placidly on a quiet country road. A typical, slightly rusted tin roof topped the old building, which was wrapped in aged, dark wood and fronted with a large covered entryway. Intermittently festooned across the building's perimeter were various tin signs with product advertisements from the World War II era.

Joining Rachel was her classmate and best friend in the world, Harvey Gordon. Rachel and Harvey's special friendship dated back as far as either of them could even remember. Due to the fact that Cottondale's only school had closed just a few years previous, Rachel and Harvey had to make the daily weekday trek to the nearby town of Paradise for their classes.

But not today. Today was Saturday.

By virtually all standards, Rachel was a beautiful young lady. Her bright red hair and somber green eyes were nothing less than striking.

Her parents often encouraged her that she was beautiful enough to move to Hollywood one day to become a famous movie star. Rachel's outward appearance contrasted greatly with her friend Harvey, who was quite ordinary for a slightly chubby, shy boy with brown hair and no real distinguishing physical features.

While Rachel's family was as close to middle class as one could be during the savages of the Second World War, Harvey was the son of a poor farmer and didn't have much—materialistically speaking. Despite their economic differences, however, Rachel and Harvey enjoyed a unique and special bond as they grew up together in their lovely home town.

As the twosome quietly relaxed on some large rocks under the notably sprawling tree next to the store, Harvey asked, "Hey, Rachel. How come your daddy likes to come here on Saturday mornings? It's not like I'm complaining or nothing. I was just wondering."

Rachel looked over at her friend and shrugged. "I'm not real sure, Harvey. I'm just glad he comes and picks you up so we can spend some time together. You know, outside of school."

"Me too."

They both smiled and were quiet for a few moments.

Rachel continued, "Come to think of it, I think my daddy is waiting on Blaine's father to come meet with him about some kinda business deal."

Harvey's shoulders visibly shrank. There was that dreaded name again—Blaine. Young Blaine Billings was the same age as Rachel and Harvey, only he lived in nearby Paradise. Born into money that was largely driven by his hard-charging entrepreneurial father, Blaine's outlook on life was one of expectation and privilege. Unfortunately, humility was nowhere to be found in him. Blaine was handsome and rich—an enviable combination to most people.

"Oh, Blaine's coming, huh?" Harvey said, not able to mask his disappointment. "I guess I was hoping it'd be just you and me today."

No sooner had these rueful words left Harvey's lips than he spotted a wall of dust stirring up about a mile down the road. It was obvious that a car was approaching. As Rachel and Harvey gazed in the distance at the rapidly approaching vehicle, young Harvey couldn't help but to feel like this was a seriously bad omen. His overwhelming sense was that his life's greatest enemy was suddenly invading his quiet world,

destroying his peace and interrupting this wonderful day he was spending with his true love.

Even at the young age of ten years old, Harvey was well beyond his years in wisdom and discernment. What he may have lacked in notable physical appearance was more than made up for by having a grounded intelligence and the ability to learn very quickly. He was also very spiritually attuned to his faith in Jesus Christ for such a young man.

Being a straight-A student and the son of a poor farmer, Harvey had very little time to spend on the normal childhood activities in life—except when it came to Rachel. Between his schooling and chores on the farm, Harvey stayed so constantly busy; he had little time to focus on himself. Despite the fact that Rachel lived so close to his family's homestead, Harvey often longed to one day go see the world outside of Cottondale so he could make his mark in it. He very much felt like he was destined to leave this place to find his destiny in some big city somewhere. Of course, he desperately wanted to bring Rachel with him. He actually couldn't picture his life without her being a big part of it.

As the shiny black, almost new, Buick Roadmaster came to a screeching halt in front of the store, the dust proceeded to settle down. Then, the driver's side door opened and a handsome man in his mid-thirties hopped out. Soon thereafter, the passenger door opened and the Billings men—both the younger and the elder—moved towards the front door of the store.

Rachel and Harvey instinctively stood up. Rachel then waved at Blaine, whose quizzical expression fell into a sneer when he saw his two classmates under the tree. The young interloper was there for one reason and one reason only—to see Rachel.

Blaine's father marched purposefully towards the front door of the store as Blaine's path diverted towards the tree, where his beautiful prize awaited him to rescue her from such a poor, loser like Harvey.

When Blaine made it to their spot, he turned around and pointed back at his father's automobile.

"So how do y'all like daddy's new car?" he said.

Rachel grinned as Harvey looked down, trying to mask his contempt.

"It's real nice," Rachel said. "What kind is it?"

"It's a new Buick," Blaine said proudly.

“How did your daddy get a new car? I hear they’re real hard to get these days.”

Blaine grinned. “I reckon it’s because my daddy’s such an important man. Only those who are important in the war effort can get new automobiles these days, you know.”

“So when did he get it?” she asked.

“It was one of the last ones made back in February this year,” Blaine bragged. “Daddy said they’re not making many new cars for a while; you know, until we win the war and all.”

“That’s nice,” Rachel said.

She started twirling her hair.

Rachel then elbowed Harvey to show his manners.

“Oh yeah,” Harvey said. “It’s a really pretty car, for sure.”

Blaine sported a satisfied look. Since he had now taken what he considered to be a superior position over Harvey, a blanket of smugness settled into his attitude.

“So what’re y’all doing?” Blaine asked.

“We’re just waiting for my daddy to have his meeting with yours,” Rachel said.

“Oh,” Blaine said. “I saw Mr. Green at the doorway to the store when we pulled in. Why do you think they’re meeting today?”

“Do you think it has something to do with the war?” Harvey added.

Blaine ignored him and focused his gaze on Rachel.

“I’m pretty sure they have some important money business to discuss,” Rachel said. “Daddy’s bank in Bridgeport is supposed to help Mr. Billings do some kind of work project ... I think....”

Blaine nodded slowly. “That makes sense. My dad doesn’t tell me too much, except to teach me things about how this world works. I guess since he’s so important, he needs money from the bank for something.”

“Probably so,” Rachel agreed.

“So are y’all coming to the big homecoming lunch at church tomorrow?” Harvey asked Blaine.

Blaine shook his head. “Dad says he’s too busy to mess around with silly things like church. He’s too busy staying focused on making money and helping our country defeat Hitler.”

For some reason, Harvey felt bold. “Y’all should still come to church, Blaine. We’ve been studying the gospel of Luke this month—”

“For your information,” Blaine said hotly. “I don’t need religion and I don’t need you telling me what to do.”

Harvey shook his head. “Don’t be so dramatic, Blaine. I was just trying to be friendly.”

Blaine snorted.

Rachel understood what was going on—a covert battle for her affection. She quickly made her decision and patted Harvey on the shoulder and walked towards Blaine, saying, “Hey Blaine, let’s go check out the new candies Mr. Jerry has inside for a minute.”

Blaine smiled at his apparent victory.

“Don’t worry—we’ll be back in a bit,” she said to Harvey.

“Oh, okay...” Harvey said, dejectedly.

He sat back down on a rock.

A familiar blanket of rejection descended upon Harvey. It was hard for anyone—let alone a ten-year old boy—to deal with seeing arrogant people always seem to win. Deep in his heart, in a place he rarely showed the world, Harvey was terrified that the one thing he wanted more than anything else—to one day marry his beloved Rachel—would somehow elude him. Worse yet, the idea of Blaine taking her away from him tore his little heart to shreds.

Because of the hardships that so often emanate from his blue collar status in life, Harvey always knew he was born to serve others. But the one thing he had prayed for so strongly in his young life was that God would bless him with the woman of his dreams to be his wife one day. To Harvey, this wasn’t a very big request for God to fill. He very much clung to this tenuous hope.

After an agonizing fifteen minutes of waiting, both Rachel and Blaine exited Jerry’s General Store, followed by their fathers. By the tone of their muffled voices and the general laughter that ensued, things seemed to have gone pretty well inside. Interestingly, Rachel was carrying a bag of candy.

But it was something else that suddenly caught Harvey’s attention. Something he couldn’t believe he was seeing with his very own eyes: Blaine took Rachel’s hand and held it as they moved towards Mr. Billings’ car.

Oh no!!! he thought.

Rachel’s father looked directly at Harvey and waved him over as the others got into the Buick. Much to Harvey’s dismay, once he reached the front of the store where Mr. Green was waiting, Blaine, his

father, and Rachel started driving off; back in the direction from whence the car had approached. Rachel waved at Harvey with an uncomfortable grin from the car's window. Harvey reluctantly waved back.

Harvey's dismay was apparent, so Mr. Green quickly said, "I'm sorry, Harvey. But Rachel is going over to a gathering at Blaine's house in Paradise today."

"But ... why—?"

"Everything is okay, young man. It's just that we have some important business to attend to with Blaine's father at their house."

Harvey's facial expression betrayed his severe disappointment. Mr. Green picked up on this and said, "Listen, son. Let me give you a little bit of advice. The sooner you accept your station in life, the sooner you'll find peace and contentment. You can't fight who you are."

Harvey looked up and said, "I don't understand—"

"You don't need to understand, Harvey. Just listen to me. Ole Jerry inside has agreed to take you home for me because I need to follow Mr. Billings to his house. That means I can't take you home today. But Jerry will take good care of you, I promise."

Harvey frowned.

"Go on, now. Jerry is waiting for you inside. When I picked you up this morning, I told your folks I might need Jerry to take you home for me today—depending on what happened in my meeting."

Mr. Green patted Harvey on the shoulder. "Everything will be okay, young man. Trust me."

Reluctantly, Harvey turned on his heels and proceeded inside as Rachel's father departed.

As the screen door smacked close behind Harvey, the various rustic aromas of sassafras, molasses, fresh bread, and stick candy from the old general store gently surrounded him in a familiar way. He could hear Mr. Green get into his car and begin to drive away. The sounds of grinding gravel under his tires signaled that Harvey was now all alone with the bald, thin-framed owner of the store, who appeared to be in his late fifties.

Jerry looked up from behind the counter when he saw his visitor and declared, "Well hello, Harvey! C'mon over here and let's have a little chat."

Harvey really liked the old man. Actually, everyone did. He headed towards the counter, plopped down on one of the stools, and then looked up at the proprietor as if the world was about to end.

“What’s with the sour look?” said Jerry.

Harvey shook his head. He hesitated to share his frustration out of fear that verbalizing it would somehow make it worse. He felt that by keeping it to himself, he could still cling to a sliver of hope that he was over-reacting to Blaine’s invasion.

“Let me guess,” Jerry continued. “You’re upset because Blaine drove off with *your* girl. Am I right?”

Harvey was a terrible liar, so he couldn’t even muster an ounce of strength to internalize it anymore.

“I’m afraid so, sir,” he mused.

Jerry nodded once. “Would you mind terribly if I gave you some friendly advice?”

“No sir, I wouldn’t mind that at all.”

“Now I’m not going to give you some selfish advice like what Mr. Green just tried to give you outside. I’m talking about something very important; something that will help you to grow closer to the Lord.”

“How did you—?”

“Never mind about that, son. Please just listen to me. The first thing I want to tell you is that true love may indeed take both people involved, but real love always starts with God. And I mean *always*.”

Harvey nodded his understanding.

Jerry continued, “Let me share a verse with you I’m sure you’ve heard many times before. But this time, I want you to listen to it very, very closely. It’s *John 3:16 ... For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”

“Yes sir, I’ve heard that many times at church.”

“Indeed you have. But today, I want you to really think about the fierce, real love it took for God to give His only Son to the world. That, my friend, is exactly what real love is all about—sacrificial love.”

“What exactly do you mean by that?”

“Jesus Christ became flesh out of His intense love for His people and to save humanity from its sin. Whether one likes it or not, all people are born sinful and must overcome their self-focus in order to survive this temporary world through Jesus. Sadly, folks like Mr. Billings and Mr. Green are overcome with their desire to be the god of their own world and pursue what they really love, which is money.

Their love of money is to the exclusion of God—I mean, the *real* God.”

“Well, that ain’t right,” Harvey said. “You know something? We had to memorize the Ten Commandments in Sunday school, and—”

“You’re on the right track with that,” Jerry interrupted. “But for today, I’d like you to focus on the first two of those commandments. In particular, the first one. Can you tell me what the first two commandments are?”

“Yes sir. They’re in *Exodus 20:3-4* ... *You shall have no other gods before me, and You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*”

“Very good. Although you don’t hear about it very often, virtually everything in the Bible centers on that one basic premise—that there is only one God, and one God alone. Not only that, but only the real God deserves worship.”

“I understand.”

“Do you, now?”

Harvey was thoughtful for a few moments.

“Yes sir,” he said, shrugging. “At least, I think I do.”

Jerry grinned. “What I mean, Harvey, is that all humans are born thinking they’re the god of their own world. As a result, they often try to block the real love of God their Father, who created them and sustains them.”

They were both quiet for a few more moments.

“Hmmm. I don’t know, Mr. Jerry. Maybe I’m just not supposed to be a big shot like Mr. Billings and Blaine. They seem to have it so easy in life.”

Jerry shook his head. “That’s only on the surface, son. Below the surface, men like that have a spiritual ugliness that’s both sad and somewhat nauseating.”

Harvey suddenly blurted, “Then how come Rachel doesn’t love me like she loves Blaine? I just don’t get it.”

Unsurprised, Jerry replied, “Because Rachel is caught up in a type of humanism.”

“Humanism—what’s that?”

Jerry sat down on a stool behind the counter to get closer to Harvey’s line of sight. The older man looked intently at his young friend, and with a gentle voice said, “Humanism is basically the belief

that human desires are more important than God's desires—or His will.”

“Ahhh, c'mon. That's just dumb.”

Jerry shrugged. “Perhaps so, but that doesn't stop people from following that sinful principle. To them, it feels good—at least, for the moment it does.”

Harvey shook his head. “Maybe if I was rich and handsome, Rachel would love me and marry me one day.”

Jerry reached across the counter and patted Harvey on the shoulder before saying, “Let me give you another important verse to think about, young man. You weren't born rich, but you do have your whole life ahead of you. And believe it or not, your struggles will ironically forge you into a powerful man one day. You need to listen to me because I've gotten pretty darned good at seeing things like this.”

Harvey reluctantly grinned.

Jerry continued, “Here's the verse ... *1 Corinthians 1:26 ... Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*”

“Well, no. I wasn't born noble, that's for sure.”

“Perhaps not, but you were certainly *reborn* noble when you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ at church a few months ago.”

Harvey visibly brightened. “Something just came over me that day at church and it was so neat. I didn't know you were there that day.”

“I sure was,” Jerry said proudly. “Watching folks genuinely surrender their life to Jesus Christ is just about my favorite thing in the whole wide world.”

A huge smile emerged on Harvey's face.

Jerry nodded and continued, “Anyway, I have one more thing for you, before I run you back home.”

“What's that?”

“As a Christian, you shouldn't merely pursue things in life that somehow make you feel better. That's what Rachel and Blaine now do. Instead, you should pursue eternal things which make you a better follower of Jesus Christ. In the end, that is what's truly important.”

Harvey was quiet for a few moments as this sunk in.

Jerry continued, “Rachel and Blaine are on a worldly path which will only lead to incredible pain. They think they're pursuing their dreams, but what they're actually pursuing is their destruction. Listen,

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you may not believe me now, but please trust me on this. I didn't get this old by being a fool."

"I understand, sir."

"I've got one more thing for you, Harvey."

"What's that?"

"I'd like you to never forget that real love *always* starts with the Lord. Without God, no one will ever find real love because it just doesn't exist outside of Him."

Harvey nodded. "Yes sir. I'll try to remember that."

Jerry stood back up. "How about me letting you sample some of our newest candy sticks before we saddle up in my old white Ford truck out back and I run you home? Would that be okay with you, my young friend?"

"That'd be great, Mr. Jerry. The candy sure sounds good, and I'd really appreciate a ride home. Thanks."