

Susan Whitlock

1166 Words

344 W 23rd Baxter Springs KS 66713

620-704-1102

Jael7717@gmail.com

Passingthrough.info

Joshua's Voice

Vivian collapsed with a plop and a groan, her dimpled hand massaging her forehead with slow circles. She felt Whitney, her eighteen-month-old daughter, crawl onto her crowded lap and lay her head on Vivian's breast with a sigh. Not thinking, Vivian adjusted her position to curl one arm around the small form, her other hand moving to pat her firm, round belly. A wistful smile passed over her lips as she felt the one within responding to her touch. Wiggle, kick.

"Come on, Viv," Joshua's voice fell upon her ears from his position beside and just ahead of her. "It isn't much further till we can rest for the night."

Vivian tilted her head up in the direction of his voice and put on what she considered a beguiling and irresistible expression. She could feel the sun's rays warm her face, though the air around her was growing frosty. She said in a firm tone, "No more."

“More, Viv,” came the immediate reply. “Just two more miles, lady. Then I’ll build another fire and make camp. We’ll eat the good bread you made and rest and sleep and maybe bathe. Just a little more.”

“And tomorrow?” she pleaded.

“Tomorrow will take care of itself,” her husband assured her. “just like today.”

“Today hasn’t exactly wowed me to the place where I’m all that trusting of tomorrow,” she answered him. She was beginning to hear the irritation making its way into her tone. She almost began to tell him how hard this was: pregnant, thirsty, tired, half-dragging Whitney. Not to mention being blind.

That had happened a week ago, three months into their journey to a new land, a great job, and a beautiful home. *If* they could reach that faraway place, just over the border of their battle-torn country. They were so close. She had been singing and daydreaming about the new baby and their new home — falling farther and farther behind. He’d warned her to stay close.

The path they were on was protected by a treaty with the government to which they were defecting. As long as they were careful not to stray from its narrow confines, their own militia could not touch them. Many times, sorties were sent to verbally harass those traveling to safety, but they rarely dared the wrath of their powerful neighbor by harming emigres.

They hadn’t bothered them for weeks. She had been feeling safe and light-hearted, wandering close to the edge of the highway, letting Joshua get out of sight. The flowers just off the road’s shoulder were rare, lovely, and smelled wonderful. Whitney was up ahead with Josh. What would it hurt to pick a few flowers?

That was the last thing she knew until she awoke with a terrific headache, the sound of Whit's weeping thrumming in her ears; completely in the dark.

Joshua turned and hurried back to find his wife half on, half off the path — with soldiers throwing stones and using their staffs to pound her golden head into the flower bed that had caught her eye. He was horrified by all the blood until he drew close enough to see that much of the bright red was due to the blooms, broken beneath Vivian's dear body. He dragged her back to safety, crushing the trembling Whitney to his side as he loudly crooned reassurances to them both.

The soldiers continued screaming, their wheedling voices urging him to come with them to get Vivian medical attention. But Joshua had taken care of her. He had bandaged her and made a hasty camp. Shushing Whitney, Joshua had taken Vivian into his arms, cradling her until she awoke, and they had discovered she could not see.

Joshua was a gifted doctor, but here there was little he could do for her here. She believed his promises that this was temporary blindness, caused by her brain swelling from the vicious beating. Inwardly she cringed to know that her own inattention and foolishness had caused them this sorrow. As if this journey had not been dangerous enough.

Blindness was the most frightening experience of her life. They were still headed to a good, strong new life. Whitney was safe and the babe within thrived. Joshua's love for her was deep and powerful, healing in its own right. She felt it, though she could no longer gaze into his beautiful dark eyes and see that it was so. But not *seeing* where he expected her to place her foot, as he called out four days later to "start walking", was terrifying. He gave her a staff and let Whitney walk by Vivian's side — holding tightly to her hand.

The six days that followed had been nightmarish. She was getting used to the slow rhythm of being led by the sound of Josh's sweet, tenor voice. She had always loved to hear him talk or sing; but not until blindness took her did the richness of his sound make itself known to her.

Still...not seeing the step she was taking, nor the one that might come next, was exhausting. Josh led her carefully so that by the end of the second day there was rarely a misstep, still, her nerves were raw from wondering where they were, what it looked like, how much longer — or when would her eyes work again?

At first, Joshua tried to describe the countryside; tried to humor her. But when he saw this was actually slowing her even more and doing little to relieve her anxiety, he began to respond, "Just follow me."

Finally, when she so desperately wanted to bite his head off, cry, give up, and rant and rave — she couldn't. Whitney's damp head, stirring against her breast, reminded her that she had someone who depended on her as much as she leaned on Josh.

"More, huh?" she gave in now.

"Just a little, love," his soft words caressed her as his hand cupped her elbow so she could wrestle herself back up onto complaining feet.

"I'll carry Whit," he said. He lifted the sweet lump from her arms and settled her onto his shoulders.

Whitney squealed with delight, as she always did when her funny daddy swung her up there for a ride. She wove her fingers into his soft, dark curls and joyfully dug her feet into his ribs for a giddy-up. Josh took Vivian's cool hand in his and whispered in her ear.

“Follow me?”

“Anywhere,” she sighed, a smile gracing her countenance as she rested her head on his shoulder for a brief moment, letting him set the pace for them. Steady. Slow. Sure.

What did she need other than his strong fingers curled around hers, his broad shoulders carrying all they treasured, while she wrapped a seedling in the safe warmth of her womb? Strength, hope, and joy seeped back into her soul until it ran over in a puddle on her shoes, making her laugh. What more could she possibly need than Joshua's voice?