

Limb in a Desert

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Change just one letter in the word disappointment and you have His appointment. God's will does frequently resemble, almost to a letter, some experience we do not relish. This should not seem strange. We would expect the will of a wise father to run counter to the wishes of an untutored child. So children tussle with the wisdom of spinach, toothbrushes, and sitting still in church. And their parents sit beside them wrestling with the wisdom which allowed the birth of a handicapped child, some crippling illness, or the death of a close companion.

We need to learn not only to accept the will of a wise Father but to praise Him for difficult experiences. Praise means we highly approve of God's plan and know that "behind a frowning providence there hides a smiling face." God's perplexed child learns in this story that "the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Defining for Comprehension

1. furlough
2. tranquilly
3. billowing
4. wryly
5. chafing
6. monsoon
7. incredibly
8. coped
9. aboriginal
10. involuntarily
11. desultory
12. concise

Choose the word or phrase which best defines each word at the left as it is used in the story.

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| a. breeze | b. vacation | c. length measurement |
| a. steadfastly | b. numbly | c. calmly |
| a. multiplying | b. surging | c. overflowing |
| a. with pain | b. bitterly | c. forcefully humorous |
| a. balking | b. irritated | c. peeling |
| a. chant | b. hurricane | c. seasonal wind |
| a. dishonestly | b. confidentially | c. unbelievably |
| a. exhausted | b. overcame | c. confined successfully |
| a. native | b. imitation | c. wild |
| a. aimlessly | b. with eagerness | c. unconsciously |
| a. alone | b. random | c. humid |
| a. compact | b. accurate | c. to sever |

13. incoherent

14. tepid

15. tentacles

16. respite

a. deaf

a. lukewarm

a. items

a. shelter

b. not logical

b. top-heavy

b. arms

b. interval of rest

c. an enemy

c. cone-shaped

c. prickles

c. revenges

Limb in a Desert

From where she waited on the shaded veranda of the mission hospital, Nurse Ruth Murray scanned the brilliant blue Australian sky.

The flying doctor's plane was not in sight.

She turned back half-ashamedly to the white-clad woman behind her.

"Sorry I flared at you just now, Heather," she said haltingly. "I know it's not your fault you're going back south instead of me. It's just . . . well, maybe you get mean when you're terribly disappointed, and probably no one in the home office realized how much I was looking forward to that **furlough**. But I can't help feeling forgotten out here now!"

"God hasn't forgotten you, Ruth," Nurse Heather Parker repeated **tranquilly**.

Ruth said nothing to that. She gazed up into the shimmering heat to where a small black speck now grew in the southern sky . . . and droned faintly. . . .

And she felt her breath choke in her throat. *It's not fair! It's really not fair*, she thought bitterly. *Why isn't it me going home on that plane and not this other woman getting out after a mere couple of months' service? Why is it so unfair?*

As the plane tore a **billowing** wall along the parched clay airstrip back of the hospital, Ruth hurried to meet Heather Parker's replacement. But instead of a new nurse walking from the plane with the pilot, there was only a young, lean man.

"Another new face," Ruth said to herself dispiritedly, while she waited for the two men to

reach her. Another new face—and only herself, who every morning for two long years had gazed from the hospital steps across the vast, pindan scrub.

Who could really argue now, Ruth smiled **wryly**, that she hadn't been left right out on a limb? What purpose could God possibly have in leaving her here when other people got furloughs, replacements, sick leave, almost without lifting a finger for them?

"Morning, Ruth," Jeff Bates' cheery grin, at least, was no stranger to her.

"Well, where have you hidden her?" Ruth tried hard to smile. "Tied up in the mailbag in two parts or what?"

Jeff grinned more broadly.

"If you mean Nurse Lett, the lass in question has broken her arm. Compound fracture of the ulna, right, Doc?" He turned to the quiet man beside him, who nodded, gray eyes smiling. "By the way, Ruth," Jeff added, "the relieving chief, Flying Doctor Peter Sommers. Peter, Nurse Ruth Murray of the mission. Ruth's quite an old-timer hereabouts now."

"I surely am!" Ruth said crisply, crushing her bitterness down again. "How do you do, Dr. Sommers? I hope my new companion nurse won't be long arriving. She'll strike the 'Wet' and have trouble if she is!"

"That is one of our worries," Peter Sommers admitted. "But I'm afraid she'll have to stay at Ord Crossing for a couple of weeks." He laughed. "She's **chafing** at the bit to get here, you know!"

“She’ll need all her enthusiasm in this dead-end furnace,” Ruth said dryly. “And I hope you warned her to clear decks for oceans of slippery red mud?”

Jeff grinned sheepishly and Peter Sommers said: “He’s been feeding us both on tall stories of the territory ‘Wet.’ However, Nurse Lett is still with us! And as for me . . .” his gray eyes grew serious, “well, like you, Nurse Murray, I put my trust in God!”

Ruth felt herself flush guiltily. She bit her lip.

And as they turned toward the hospital where Heather was waiting on the veranda, suddenly everything overwhelmed her again, and she remembered how all her disappointment and bitterness had come to the surface just before Jeff Bates and Dr. Sommers arrived.

Somehow, when she had been waiting for the plane with Heather on the hospital veranda, she had been unable to hold it back any longer.

“Not a cloud in sight today, so you’ll get through all right,” she had said. “Luckily for you, our ‘Wet’s’ not running to time this year!”

“I’m so sorry about all this, Ruth,” Heather Parker said gently, her eyes hidden behind the dark glasses.

“Even if the superintendent gets a replacement straightaway, which isn’t likely, there won’t be much hope of her getting here until the **monsoon’s** over.” Ruth pulled her lips taut to stop their trembling. “So I’ll be bogged down here for at least another four months! And,” she forced a smile, “even my friend Billalong’s gone traveling with his mom and dad. So I won’t even have my little roly pickanniny¹ for company!”

“It probably sounds quite hypocritical,” Heather said apologetically, “but I was terribly looking forward to my term here. Now another nurse will have the blessing of doing all the tasks I hoped would be mine.”

“She was really coming to replace *me!*” Ruth reminded her shortly.

“Oh, I know. I’ve made a terrible mess of everybody’s schedules and everything. But . . . I’ve never had an allergy like this before—wherever I’ve worked!”

“You’ve never been amongst back-o-beyond’s red dust before, but I’ve had two years of it!” Then Ruth softened contritely. “I’m sorry, Heather. I know you’re having a shocking time with that rash. It’s just, oh, well, don’t look horrified, but I almost feel that the Lord has overlooked me here. I can’t help it. He’s left me stuck out on a limb.”

“He never burdens us more than He knows we can bear,” Heather said quietly but firmly, “nor without good reason.”

“It’s just that everyone else except me seems replaceable,” Ruth said stubbornly.

It was soon afterward they heard the plane.

“You’ll have coffee with us before you go?” Ruth asked Jeff Bates.

“Not going yet a while,” Jeff said cheerfully, “although we’ve a few calls to make before the ‘Wet’ hits us. Old Sawbones here wants to check your patients.”

“No ‘ins,’” Ruth told Peter Sommers. “All ‘outs.’ But you’ll hear from me over the transceiver if we need you, don’t worry.”

The flying doctor nodded and they went in from the heat.

Why couldn’t I have gone home to Sydney for a few months? Ruth cried silently as she set out tea things on a steel tray in the kitchen. *Why? Service every Sunday instead of once a quarter . . . a time with my family. I’m sure I’d have come back to the ward fresh—enthusiastic.*

“I understand your own furlough had to be put off,” Peter Sommers said quietly to Ruth, just before they took off again. Heather was with them. “I’m sorry about that, though it’s my gain, really.” He smiled. “When you haven’t had much experience, it’s a good feeling to have someone solid to call on.”

1. *pickaninny* (pɪˈkənɪnɪ). A little black child.

“I don’t feel particularly solid at the moment,” Ruth confessed wearily.

His eyes suddenly showed concern, but she shrugged and turned away.

Then, when she had waved them all off in the tiny silver plane, the breathless loneliness stole back over the desert. And Ruth wondered how long it would be before she saw the face of another white woman again.

An **incredibly** busy few days gave her little time to brood. It grew hotter and steamier, and she **coped** with a seemingly endless queue of outpatients—alone! Uranium prospectors, stock riders, overland telegraph linesmen, well sinkers, all seemed to drift in with cuts and sores needing dressings. And Ruth lost count of the number of **aboriginal** lubras² and pickaninnies who trailed up the hospital steps for injections, gargles, and dressings.

Everyone who came talked about the “Wet.”

“Building up!” they’d say cheerfully, pointing to the heavy clouds in the northwest. The clouds would rumble nervously, then disappear again in a fresh blaze of heat.

When at last the sun-parched land was blanketed and darkened by clouds and lay still and silent, waiting for the rain to slake its eight-month thirst, Billalong’s mother carried her little aboriginal boy, Ruth’s little friend, through the township’s straggling street to the hospital.

It was nearly two years since Billalong’s hazardous birth by candlelight under a bough—since Ruth had stayed by his hospital cot two full days and nights nursing the precious thread of life, adjusting transfusions, carefully keeping the half-hourly chart. Now, here was little Billalong, whom she loved, with a grotesquely swollen leg, angry red stripes marching up it . . . delirious with fever. . . .

“Oh, no!” Ruth cried **involuntarily**. “Why

this? When I’m so alone? And when the ‘Wet’ . . .” She broke off. And at the same time she heard slow, heavy rain spattering on the iron roof.

Gently, Ruth took the sick child from his half-caste³ mother. She stared down into April Daylight’s wild, round eyes.

“How did this happen?” She tried to keep her voice calm. The thin little body was burning against her bare arms.

“Oh, Missy,” April wailed. “Oh, Missa Murray . . .” She began to moan, shaking her wild black hair from side to side.

Ruth knew she would get no sense from the distraught lubra. She turned to the silent, rangy myall⁴ hovering in the background of the hospital yard.

“Tim,” she called desperately. “What happened to Billy?”

The aboriginal shifted his weight from one leg to another.

“No good I tell you.” He shrugged. “Billalong him bin finish proper now, I reckon.”

“Not bin finish!” Ruth shouted angrily. “Billalong bin get about pretty quick—you watchit!”

But she knew she would get little information about Billalong’s accident from his parents—probably because it had been their fault. They acted like children. But at least, she could see, they had carried the child a long, weary way in the heat—and that was a triumph for the Christian teaching over the tribal lore!

“You, Tim, rest up longa veranda,” Ruth called to April, as she turned and stumbled through the hospital doorway.

Now, what first?

But one look at the boy’s swollen, inflamed leg told her that there was really no choice. She placed him gently in a cot. Then she made for the transceiver set.

2. *lubras* (lū brəz’). Aboriginal girls or women.

3. *half-caste*. A person of mixed racial or cultural descent.

4. *myall* (mī’ əl). Aboriginal man in Australia.

She cut in. A roar of static. That was the rain hovering around, of course. She could still hear fat, **desultory** drops patting the iron roof.

“Calling the Flying Doctor base at Ord Crossing,” Ruth tried. “I have an urgent medical. Over.”

The static made a mockery of her words.

What will I do if I can't get through to Dr. Sommers, Ruth thought desperately. What will I do? Here alone, and Billalong's leg looking as though it might erupt at any moment. It's too much, she half-sobbed. Too much to ask!

Suddenly the air cleared. She could hear a friendly conversation going on between two women on outlying stations.

“Calling Ord Crossing. Calling the Flying Doctor at Ord Crossing. This is an urgent medical call from Wallah Mission Hospital.”

Immediately the voices cut off for her, and across the network came the calm, deep voice of Peter Sommers.

“Flying Doctor base. I can hear you, Nurse Murray. I was just getting lined up for routine medicals. What's the trouble? Over.”

“I have a child admitted with an infected leg, Doctor. Possibility of septicemia.⁵ Can you make a flight immediately? The rains are close. Over to you. Over.”

“We're being flooded out here already.” Pause. “I'll try to make it.”

Ruth went into brief, **concise** details of Billalong's leg, and wrote down the instructions Dr. Sommers gave for her to carry out before he arrived.

“You'll pinpoint the strip for us, won't you, Nurse Murray?” he finished. “See you. Over.”

“See you,” Ruth whispered.

Then back to Billalong, who was tossing in the little hospital cot, calling out a wild **incoherent** mixture of pidgin⁶ and yabber.

“There. There,” Ruth crooned, holding his

hot, thin arm against the cool, glass thermometer. But there was no wide, answering grin from Billalong this time—just wild, unrecognizing dark eyes staring up.

Ruth's heart froze—105 degrees! She raced to “Drugs” for the sedative Peter Sommers had prescribed and for a basin of **tepid** water to sponge and cool the little, dusky body.

Through the louvered window of the office, as she relocked the cupboard, Ruth could see swirling, blanketing clouds. They were streaming across the sky now.

“Please, please, let the rains hold off until Dr. Sommers gets here,” Ruth prayed. “Or he mightn't be able to land . . . and Billalong . . .” She shuddered.

As she gently sponged the child, patting him dry, and trying everything to bring down that terrifying 105 degrees, she thought miserably, *Now's when I could do with that other nurse. How am I ever going to cope with all this alone, and the “Wet” coming on, too? And why has it all been heaped onto me . . . when I'm so tired?*

It grew so dark inside that Ruth could hardly see. Outside the thunder rumbled heavily. It tried to rain a couple more times, then held off.

Ruth rounded up the old aboriginal handyman who worked at the hospital.

“Spread white sheets at each end of the airstrip for the pilot, Jack,” she said crisply. “If it gets dark, light the oil drums and set them by the sheets.”

“The pilot must be able to land! He must!” Ruth cried despairingly, as a whirl of dusty wind caught her veil and twisted it around her head.

She ran back up the hospital steps and caught the miserable gaze of April Daylight, huddled next to Tim on the veranda.

“Billalong him sleep,” Ruth said gently. “Doctor fella come along soon, April. He fixit Billalong proper.”

5. *septicemia* (sep tə sē' mē ə). Blood poisoning.

6. *pidgin* (pi' jən). Language with a simplified grammar and a limited and mixed vocabulary.

“Oh, Missa Murray.” April caught at Ruth’s hand piteously. “Billalong, he not bin finish, Missy?”

“Billalong not bin finish!” Ruth said firmly.

Then the interminable waiting, golden tentacles of lightning fingering closer, thunder booming across the crouched scrub. *They have to come now*, Ruth thought desperately. *They have to get here before the rains. I can’t carry the whole burden alone. I can’t. I can’t!*

Lightning snaked right overhead and metallic claps rocked the hardboard building.

In the brief respite before pelting rain drummed deafeningly against the iron roof, Ruth heard the steady drone of the plane.

She raced onto the veranda.

“Did you hear it?” she shouted to April and Tim. They leaped up and rushed into the open with her, staring up at the sky.

“Missa Murray get wet,” April said reprovingly.

Ruth brushed the first real rain off her face, half-laughing, half-crying. “They’ve made it!” she shouted.

There was a blur of fuzzy cabin light in the turbulent sky as the pilot circled closer. A really

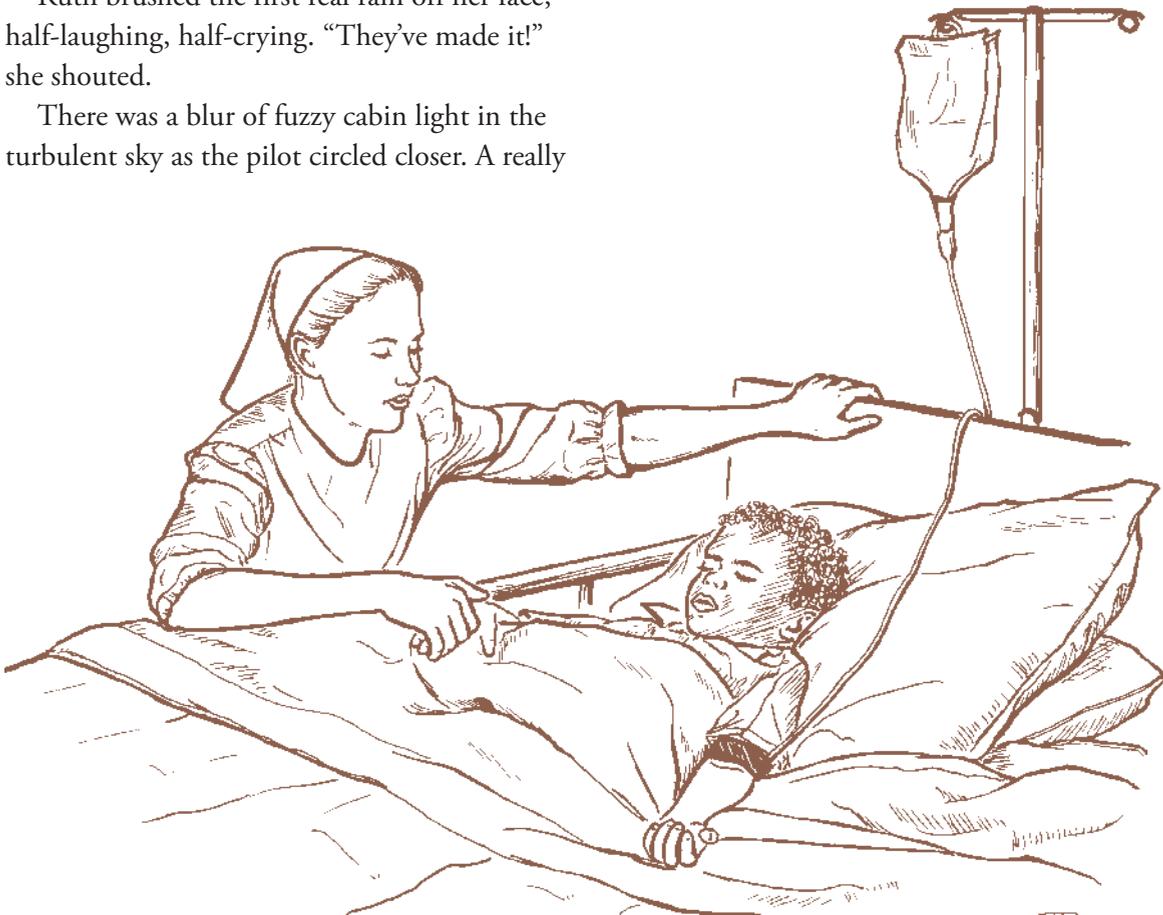
drenching downpour sent them all scurrying, as the plane taxied and then skidded along the clay strip.

Ruth felt her breath ease out again.

They’d really made it. There would be trouble aplenty to getting out again in this storm, she knew, but at least the doctor was here. *At least*, she thought as she waited for the two men in their streaming plastic waterproofs to reach the steps, *I can pass the responsibility of Billalong over to Dr. Sommers now.*

She stood a little aside while the doctor made his examination of the boy, there if she was wanted, but trying to withdraw from it all. She felt weak and exhausted, now that the responsibility was lifted. *Why have I been left here?* she asked herself again. *Why? Surely there should be others.*

Peter Sommers turned to her. “You know that I can’t save the leg, nurse?”



It was the last blow. She felt the tears start behind her eyelids. But she nodded.

“Will you get permission from the mother to operate below the knee?” the Flying Doctor said gently. “Can you explain . . . well, that it’s his leg or his life?”

Ruth nodded dumbly, tears streaming down her face in a rough kind of harmony with the rain pounding on the roof.

“I’d like to take him back to the Crossing, but that’s impossible, tonight anyway. And I can’t let that leg go!” He frowned. “He’ll need a blood transfusion. Have you supplies?”

Ruth shook her head.

“No blood. We don’t keep stocks. But there are a few donors over in the town.”

“I see.” He paused. “You said the child was born here, didn’t you? Do you have records of his grouping?”

Ruth put her hands over her eyes in sudden pain.

What had made her forget about Billalong’s

Rh-negative blood? Wasn’t that the reason he’d spent so many weeks in the hospital after his birth? Wasn’t that why she’d come to regard him as her own very special pickanniny?

There’d been too much selfish dwelling on her imagined wrongs, she scolded herself. Too little trust! That’s why she’d forgotten. Why, she hadn’t been able to see further than the nose on her face, or realized that God knew her capabilities and usefulness far better than she knew them herself!

“Billalong has Rh-negative blood,” she said. But she said it quietly and smiled into Peter Sommers’ gray eyes.

He stared at her.

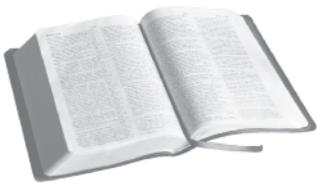
Then, as dismay crept over his face, she put out her hand. “But so have I, Peter. I gave him two transfusions at his birth. And now, you know, I’m beginning to see something. God didn’t leave me here on a limb in the desert without a reason! He had a better reason than I ever could have imagined!”



Testing for Understanding

1. Ruth Murray’s home was a city in
 - a. Australia
 - b. the United States.
 - c. Great Britain.
 - d. Canada.
2. Heather Parker was leaving the mission because
 - a. there had been a quarrel.
 - b. the short term she had promised was completed.
 - c. urgent needs had come up at home.
 - d. she had health problems.
3. As the story opens, Ruth is expecting the plane to bring
 - a. a replacement for Heather.
 - b. someone to take her place.
 - c. a new doctor.
 - d. medical supplies.
4. Worship services were held at Wallah Mission
 - a. four times a year.
 - b. once a month.
 - c. every four months.
 - d. every Sunday.

5. Billalong became special to Ruth because
 - a. he came often for transfusions.
 - b. his parents were her close friends.
 - c. they both had a rare blood type.
 - d. she had partially raised him.
6. The Mission Board hadn't given Ruth a furlough because
 - a. they couldn't.
 - b. her replacement broke an arm.
 - c. the weather prevented it.
 - d. they didn't understand her need.
7. The thing that made Ruth's near future seem the most hopeless was
 - a. the coming wet season.
 - b. the lack of a replacement.
 - c. the unbearable heat and dust.
 - d. the realization that Billalong was away.
8. Ruth's struggle was mostly because she lacked a sense of
 - a. sympathy.
 - b. purpose.
 - c. companionship.
 - d. being needed.
9. Ruth felt that her most desperate need was relief from
 - a. the weather.
 - b. loneliness.
 - c. responsibility.
 - d. work.
10. Ruth finally realized that
 - a. the fear of man bringeth a snare.
 - b. the desire of the righteous shall be granted.
 - c. it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.
 - d. before honor is humility.



Reading for Understanding

1. *As the plane tore a billowing wall along the parched clay airstrip back of the hospital, Ruth hurried to meet. . . .*

As the airplane landed, it had

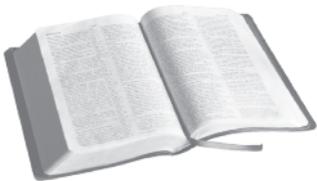
- a. cut a deep gash in the ground.
 - b. ruined a wall beside the airstrip.
 - c. slashed through a row of trees.
 - d. stirred up thick clouds of dust.
2. *"I understand your own furlough had to be put off," Peter Sommers said quietly to Ruth, just before they took off again. Heather was with them. "I'm sorry about that, though it's my gain, really." He smiled. "When you haven't had much experience, it's a good feeling to have someone solid to call on."*

These words tell us that

- a. the doctor changed Ruth's plans on purpose.
 - b. the doctor didn't really pity Ruth.
 - c. the doctor was new.
 - d. Heather was inexperienced.
3. *"She'll need all her enthusiasm in this dead-end furnace," Ruth said dryly.*
Ruth was referring to
 - a. a lack of supplies.
 - b. the loneliness and heat.
 - c. her lost furlough.
 - d. an impossible assignment.
 4. *"Flying Doctor base. I can hear you, Nurse Murray. I was just getting lined up for routine medicals. What's the trouble? Over."*

From these words we know that the doctor

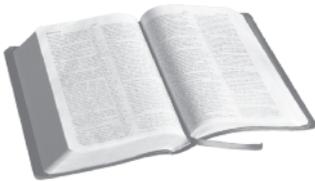
- a. could easily drop what he was doing.
 - b. would be making a great sacrifice to help Ruth.
 - c. did not want to have his routine interrupted.
 - d. had to do many things before he could leave.
5. *“Oh, Missa Murray.” April caught at Ruth’s hand piteously. “Billalong, he not bin finish, Missy?”*
 April was trying to say
- a. “Billalong won’t get well, will he?”
 - b. “Our child won’t get worse, will he?”
 - c. “My son won’t die, will he?”
 - d. “Billalong won’t be able to walk home, will he?”



Meditating for Meaning

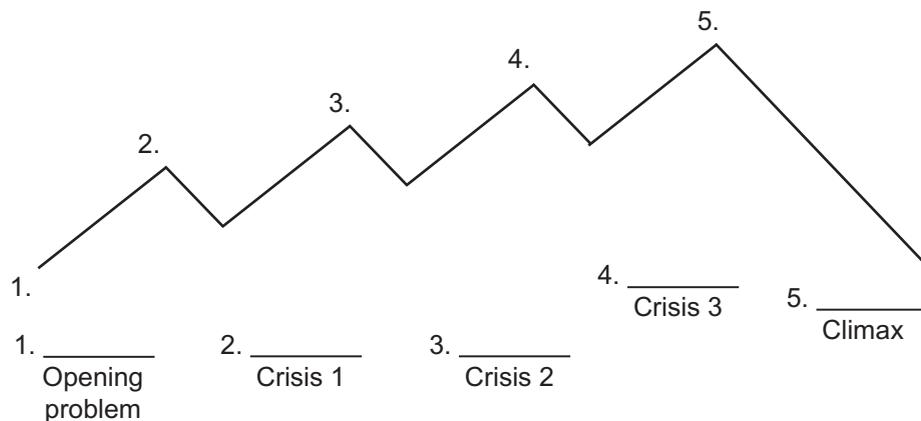
1. Ruth was not the only person in this story who was frustrated by a change of plans.
 - a. In what way was Heather’s situation at the beginning of the story much the same as Ruth’s?
 - b. Judging by their reactions, what comparison can you make between the two women?
2. God sometimes allows a problem to become more complicated before He provides a solution.
 - a. What second disappointment did Ruth experience?
 - b. What may have been God’s reason for allowing this? See Leviticus 26:23, 24.
 - c. In the light of these observations, explain Hebrews 12:6.
3. Why did Ruth flush guiltily when Dr. Sommers said, “Like you, Nurse Murray, I put my trust in God”?
4. Ruth said to Heather, “Luckily for you, our ‘Wet’s’ not running to time this year!”
 - a. What word in this statement shows Ruth’s wrong idea about the happenings in her life?
 - b. This word suggests that the happenings in a person’s life are not _____ .
 - c. How would this idea lead to the frustration that Ruth was experiencing?
 - d. What is the proper idea about the way things happen?
 - e. Quote a Scripture to support your answer.
 - f. In what way did the irregular “Wet” prove to be as much for Ruth’s benefit as it was for Heather’s?
5. The story pictures a buildup in the weather.
 - a. At what point in Ruth’s experience does the weather climax?
 - b. What does this symbolize about her experience at that point?
 - c. Study the part of the story where these words appear: “It grew so dark inside that Ruth could hardly see. Outside, the thunder rumbled heavily.” What do these words symbolize about Ruth at this point?
 - d. What did the author mean by this description: “Ruth nodded dumbly, tears streaming down her face in a kind of rough harmony with the rain pounding on the roof”?
6. God does not allow our trials to become intense unless we need such testing.
 - a. What made Ruth forget Billalong’s special need, his negative blood?
 - b. What then was God’s purpose in sending her a family with such a painfully demanding need?

7. Our difficult experiences can lead us to a better relationship with God.
 - a. What did Ruth's experience teach her about relating to God?
 - b. A person's thoughts and words show when such a relationship is missing. Study Ruth's reactions throughout the story. She _____ about her difficult circumstances.
 - c. By such a response, what was she really saying to God about what He was doing in her life?
 - d. What proper response should she have had? See 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
 - e. By this response, what would she have been saying to God about what He was doing in her life?
8. What does the last sentence in the story reveal about God?



Looking for Literary Technique

A careful study of this story will reveal that it contains a complication plot. The following diagram will help you trace the rising conflict and suspense to the climax. For each blank write a sentence to describe the crisis or problem that raises the suspense to a higher level.



A writer has much to accomplish at the beginning of a story. Before the reader advances too far into the narrative, he must know –

- the setting for the story.
- the main characters and their essential characteristics.
- the problem that begins the conflict.

These details should not be crammed awkwardly into the first several sentences. They should be unfolded naturally in the opening paragraphs. Study the first five paragraphs of this story. Answer these questions.

6. What do you learn about the setting?
7. What do you learn about the main characters?
8. What do you learn about the story conflict?

Notice also that the author introduces only details that are important to the story. You do not, for instance, learn the color of Ruth's hair, nor whether she was young or middle-aged. In a different story, such facts might have been needed to develop the conflict or theme. But they were unnecessary in this story.

In Ruth's situation, the weather played a very important part. The coming "Wet" helped to magnify Ruth's problem and thus heighten the conflict. The weather also served to symbolize Ruth's moods and crises. So the weather was referred to repeatedly throughout this story. In another story, where the weather does not play an important part, it might be mentioned only in passing or omitted entirely. As you write, try to include only details that contribute in some way to the development of your story.

In relating details, a writer may sometimes use a technique called the *flashback*. This device lets the writer go back to describe something that took place before the story began. After the flashback, the writer takes up the story again where it was interrupted.

There is a flashback in the story you have just read. The story begins with Ruth and Heather waiting for the missionary plane. You are told that Heather is leaving and that Ruth is bitter about having to stay on at the hospital, contrary to her plans. You are given the impression that Heather's departure is unexpected. But you are left in the dark about why she is leaving and why Ruth has to stay. After the plane has arrived, the writer provides a flashback to fill you in on what took place before the story began. Notice how skillfully the author takes you back in time.

“. . . Suddenly everything overwhelmed her again and she remembered how all her disappointment and bitterness had come to the surface *just before* Jeff Bates and Dr. Sommers arrived. Somehow, when she had been waiting for the plane with Heather on the hospital veranda, she had been unable to hold it back any longer.

“Not a cloud in sight today, so you'll get through all right,' she *had said*. . . .”

This flashback helps the writer by allowing her to start the story at the point of conflict without first telling all the important details leading up to it. Then after you are into the action of the story, the writer can work in these important details with one or several flashbacks.

The flashback requires careful writing. The author must shift from the present action to past events and then back to the present again, all without confusing the reader. You can best learn how this is accomplished by observing the way skillful writers handle the flashback technique.

9. Describe another example of the flashback technique from one of the other stories you have read.



Writing for Skill

Take the following situation and plot several crises leading to the climax. Decide on a setting for your story. Plan carefully for a three-dimensional character development. Jot down external, internal, and environment "facts" about your main characters. Then show their distinct personalities in your story.

A boy, on an errand for his mother, finds that two bills stuck together in the change the grocer gave him, and he now has an extra ten dollars, just the amount he needs yet to buy the new ball glove he wants. The resulting conflict leads to several crises where the boy all but does the wrong thing. But truth triumphs in the end, and the boy's experience proves that it pays to be honest.