



When Crickets Cry

By Charles Martin

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When Crickets Cry By Charles Martin

A man with a painful past. A child with a doubtful future. And a shared journey toward healing for both their hearts.

It begins on the shaded town square in a sleepy Southern town. A spirited seven-year-old has a brisk business at her lemonade stand. But the little girl's pretty yellow dress can't quite hide the ugly scar on her chest.

Her latest customer, a bearded stranger, drains his cup and heads to his car, his mind on a boat he's restoring at a nearby lake. The stranger understands more about the scar than he wants to admit. And the beat-up bread truck careening around the corner with its radio blaring is about to change the trajectory of both their lives.

Before it's over, they'll both know there are painful reasons why crickets cry . . . and that miracles lurk around unexpected corners.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

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Prologue

I pushed against the spring hinge, cracked open the screen door, and scattered two hummingbirds fighting over my feeder. The sound of their wings faded into the dogwood branches above, and it was there that the morning met me with streaks of sunkist cracking across the skyline. Seconds before, God had painted the sky a mixture of black and deep blue, then smeared it with rolling wisps of cotton and sprayed it with specks of glitter, some larger than others. I turned my head sideways, sort of corkscrewing my eyes, and decided that heaven looked like a giant granite countertop turned upside down and framing the sky. Maybe God was down here drinking His coffee too. Only difference was, He didn't need to read the letter in my hand. He already knew what it said.

Below me the Tallulah River spread out seamlessly into Lake Burton in a sheet of translucent, unmoving green, untouched by the antique cutwaters and Jet Skis that would split her skin and roll her to shore at 7:01 a.m. In moments, God would send the sun upward and westward where it would shine hot, and where by noon the glare off the water would be painful and picturesque.

I stepped off the back porch, the letter clutched in my hand, and picked my barefoot way down the stone steps to the dock. I walked along the bulkhead, felt the coolness of the mist rising on my legs and face, and climbed the steps leading to the top of the dockhouse. I slid into the hammock and faced southward down the lake, looking out over my left knee. I looped my finger through the small brass circle tied to the end of a short string and pulled gently, rocking myself.

If God was down here drinking His coffee, then He was on his second cup, because He'd already Windexed the sky. Only the streaks remained.

Emma once told me that some people spend their whole lives trying to outrun God, maybe get someplace He's never been. She shook her head and smiled, wondering why. Trouble is, she said, they spend a lifetime searching and running, and when they arrive, they find He's already been there.

I listened to the quiet but knew it wouldn't last. In an hour the lake would erupt with laughing kids on inner tubes, teenagers in Ski Nautiques, and retirees in pontoon boats, replacing the Canadian geese and bream that followed a trail of Wonder Bread cast by an early morning bird lover and now spreading across the lake like the yellow brick road. By late afternoon, on the hundreds of docks stretching out into the lake, charcoal grills would simmer with the smell of hot dogs, burgers, smoked oysters, and spicy sausage. And in the yards and driveways that all leaned inward toward the lake's surface like a huge salad bowl, folks of all ages would tumble down Slip'n Slides, throw horseshoes beneath the trees, sip mint juleps and margaritas along the water's edge, and dangle their toes off the second stories of their boathouses. By 9:00 p.m., most every homeowner along the lake would launch the annual hour-long umbrella of sonic noise, lighting the lake in flashes of red, blue, and green rain. Parents would gaze upward; children would giggle and coo; dogs would

bark and tug against their chains, digging grooves in the back sides of the trees that held them; cats would run for cover; veterans would remember; and lovers would hold hands, slip silently into the out coves, and skinny-dip beneath the safety of the water. Sounds in the symphony of freedom.

It was Independence Day.

Unlike the rest of Clayton, Georgia, I had no fireworks, no hot dogs, and no plans to light up the sky. My dock would lie quiet and dark, the grill cold with soot, old ashes, and spiderwebs. For me, freedom felt distant. Like a smell I once knew but could no longer place. If I could, I would have slept through the entire day like a modern-day Rip van Winkle, opened my eyes tomorrow, and crossed off the number on my calendar. But sleep, like freedom, came seldom and was never sound. Short fits mostly. Two to three hours at best.

I lay on the hammock, alone with my coffee and yellowed memories. I balanced the cup on my chest and held the wrinkled, unopened envelope. Behind me, fog rose off the water and swirled in miniature twisters that spun slowly like dancing ghosts, up through the overhanging dogwood branches and hummingbird wings, disappearing some thirty feet in the air.

Her handwriting on the envelope told me when to read the letter within. If I had obeyed, it would have been two years ago. I had not, and would not today. Maybe I could not. Final words are hard to hear when you know for certain they are indeed final. And I knew for certain. Four anniversaries had come and gone while I remained in this nowhere place. Even the crickets were quiet.

I placed my hand across the letter, flattening it upon my chest, spreading the corners of the envelope like tiny paper wings around my ribs. A bitter substitute.

Around here, folks sit in rocking chairs, sip mint juleps, and hold heated arguments about what exactly is the best time of day on the lake. At dawn, the shadows fall ahead of you, reaching out to touch the coming day. At noon, you stand on your shadows, caught somewhere between what was and what will be. At dusk, the shadows fall behind you and cover your tracks. In my experience, the folks who choose dusk usually have something to hide.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Vandorn:

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Irene Allen:

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Ella Hodge:

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