

The Accidental Voyage

Discovering
Hymns
of the Early
Centuries

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Douglas Bond

Author of the Crown & Covenant Series

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of the Early Centuries

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Summary of the Mr. Pipes Adventures

In Annie and Drew's first meeting with Mr. Pipes, they discovered the odd little man playing the organ behind a curtain in the ancient church in Olney, England, where long ago John Newton wrote his hymns and preached. This kindly old man broke down their preference for all things new and popular by enchanting them with stories from the past, stories about fishing on The River Great Ouse, about sailing, about exploring the English countryside, and most of all about hymns and hymn writers from the British Isles. Accompanied by his cat, Lord Underfoot, Mr. Pipes taught the children to fish for barbel the Izaak Walton way and to hand, reef, and steer his little boat *Toplady*. But the greatest thing he taught them was how to know, love, and worship God.

The following summer, after a year of letter writing with Mr. Pipes, the children's parents finally agreed to let Annie and Drew fly back to England, cross the channel, and travel with the old man on a tour of the European continent. Dr. Dudley, Mr. Pipes's over-protective doctor and friend, strongly disapproved of such goings on. The threesome got locked in and spent the night in Martin Luther's castle, ate hamburgers in Erfurt and bratwurst in Wittenburg, rescued a nearly drowned kitten, went on a diet in Worms, sailed down the Rhine, toured a famous organ builder's factory—all the while shadowed by an elusive spy. They finally fled out an upper-story window in Tubingen

under cover of darkness and made good their escape to Switzerland. They milked cows on an ancient dairy farm, and followed the cobblestone path of John Calvin in Geneva. Throughout the adventures, Mr. Pipes told them the stories of the psalms and hymns of the Protestant Reformation. Finally, on the steps of St. Pierre, Calvin's church, the spy is cornered and the mystery is solved.

Next Christmas vacation, Annie and Drew met Mr. Pipes and a reluctant Dr. Dudley in New England for a chilly visit to the landmarks of American history: Mayflower II near Plymouth Plantation, USS Constitution at the wharf in Boston, Nassau Hall and the battlefield at Princeton, all the while the biggest snow-storm of the winter brewing in their wake. They went rowing on the Delaware River, feasted on Atlantic salmon, and made a treacherous journey with Dr. Dudley behind the wheel of a rented pickup truck, driven mostly on the wrong side of the road. Throughout their travels, Mr. Pipes told the children the story of American hymn writers, Dr. Dudley mystified and resentful that anyone would have ever left England for the colonies in the first place. Finally, snowbound in Massachusetts and guided by Mr. Pipes, Annie put her pen to paper and wrote her own hymn, all the while attempting to tame a precarious new pet they called Monochrome. As lovely as the snow was, it seemed that they would miss Christmas because of it. In a break in the weather, Dr. Dudley confidently demonstrated his skill in snow skiing, but suddenly found himself in need of a doctor.

In their fourth adventure, Mr. Pipes and Annie and Drew are wholly unprepared for . . .

The Accidental Voyage!

1

So This Is Rome?

Shepherd of Tender Youth (Clement of Alexandria)

Christ, our triumphant King,
We come thy Name to sing;
Hither our children bring,
To shout thy praise.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA
(TRANSLATION BY HENRY MARTYN DEXTER)

“Pizza!” thought Drew, breathing in the savory aroma of herbs, tomatoes, fresh-baked pizza crust, and heaps of melting mozzarella cheese. He licked his lips and rolled his eyes in anticipation as he raced—rather, putted—along the Via di Borgo on his blue moped. He inhaled again, and promptly sputtered and coughed as his lungs filled with the diesel fumes of a passing bus. Steadying his moped, he blinked several times, trying to see Mr. Pipes and Annie riding ahead of him through the smoky gray haze.

“Hey! Wait up!” he called, trying to coax more speed out of the tiny electric motor.

They raced on, unable to hear above the din of the city and the frantic buzzing of the electric bicycles. Drew pedaled furiously. He must have slowed down back there at the pizzeria. Glancing back over his shoulder, he decided it had to be pizza—pepperoni pizza.

A new scent filled Drew’s nostrils as he raced around the next corner, still trying to catch up. Lining the streets under cover of rows of white canvas awnings, vendors waved bunches of colorful flowers and shouted at people to stop and buy. Though eager to catch up, Drew slowed down for a better look.

Without warning, a yellow Fiat coughed past him on the left, and with a squealing of tires and a sharp blast of his horn, the driver cut Drew off, narrowly missing his front tire.

Drew clawed at the brakes on the handlebars and swerved. His eyes wide with fright, he desperately tried to avoid a large bucket of carnations in his waggling path. With a *crash!* and a *sploosh!*, water from the bucket drenched him from head to toe, and he landed in a sodden heap surrounded by limp flowers, an empty bucket, his crashed moped, and a stomping-mad Italian woman.

“*Imbecilio!*” cried the woman, her black hair tied back in a red scarf, and her brawny arms on her hips.

Drew sat up and cleared a mangle of soggy pink petals from his face. In spite of the language barrier, he detected from her bulging eyes and expressive hands that the woman was less than happy with him. Something about her reminded him of an Italian opera he’d once seen on television. Had he understood the spoken part of Italian, he would have heard the following:

“Do I look like somebody who can afford to have a bucket of flowers wasted? No! My precious, *precious* flowers. What on earth are you doing in Rome, anyway? You came for the driving, no? I know, I know, you’re a tourist—probably American.”

Drew caught the word “American.” But it had an “o” at the end; in fact, it sounded like most of her words had an “o” at the end.

“Whatever, whatever, I don’t have to like the way you drive your moped. All right all right, anyway: I know, in Rome tourists are our bread and Gorgonzola. La, la, la. You come to see all our old stuff—we have the best crumbling old stuff in the world! And you come to eat our food—we have the best food in the world! And I had—*had*, mind you—the best flowers in the world until you smashed them into this heap of rubbish! Anyway, we have the best everything else in the world, right here in Rome (well, maybe not the best tourists)! Do you think I don’t know all this? No. But why did you have to ruin *my* flowers? Why? Why not Luigi’s or Signora Pellagrino’s? Why me? Why?”

Drew stared dumbly back at the woman and wondered how she could say all that without taking a breath. She probably wouldn’t understand if he apologized. But maybe if he spoke really slowly—

“I a-m s-o s-o-r-r-y,” said Drew, speaking as loudly as he could. She just stared. He tried again, this time holding his hands, palms up, and shaking them for emphasis with each word.

The hands seemed to help. She answered in Italian:

“Yeah, yeah. So sorry, are you? Lot of good that does my poor flowers, no?”

Drew wished he could make her understand, but after another pleading look into her angry face, he fumbled in his pocket for a handful of lire—Mr. Pipes had told them that it took lots of lire to buy anything. He thrust the money into the flower lady’s fist and disentangled himself and the moped from the flowers and bucket. Dripping wet, he yanked red carnations out of the handlebars and spokes, clambered back onto his moped, and urged it after Mr. Pipes and his sister.

So this is Rome, he thought, frowning and wiping a flower petal off his wet cheek. He strained to see Mr. Pipes and Annie through the weaving traffic. His sister’s blond hair flashed in the sunlight as it streamed from under her helmet. He thought back on Mr. Pipes’s first letter outlining his plan for an adventure in

Italy. Drew wasn't so sure about Italy; why not just go back to Olney and have another summer of adventures on The Great Ouse, sailing and fishing and exploring the countryside with Mr. Pipes and the Howard children? He did miss Bentley and even his sister Clara.

Ah, but then Mr. Pipes had mentioned Italian food. *It'd better be really good*, he thought, *after all this*. Then he remembered the wonderful smells of that pizza. *Give Italy a chance, give it a chance*, he told himself.

Meanwhile, Annie held on tightly behind Mr. Pipes and gazed from left to right at the bustling city. Her imagination raced back in time at the sight of an ancient arch or crumbling column, and the next moment she felt a smothering uneasiness at the chaos of surging, perspiring bodies and impatient motorists blaring their horns and hammering with their arms out open windows against the sides of their cars. Everyone seemed to be talking and gesturing at once, and traffic seemed to go round and round without ever getting anywhere. The racket was deafening.

Mr. Pipes had said that Italy involved some inconvenience to the foreign adventurer, but he assured Annie that they would not be disappointed and that perhaps the greatest adventure ever awaited them in the land of the early Christian saints—and martyrs.

Mr. Pipes rounded a corner, and Annie closed her eyes and breathed in the fragrant scents of carnations, gardenias, and a variety of roses. Row upon row of flower stalls lined the narrow street. She nearly turned all the way around on the back of the moped, taking in the heavenly panoply of color as she and Mr. Pipes rode past the flower market. She caught sight of Drew at the far end of the street and tapped on Mr. Pipes's shoulder.

"Drew's pretty far back!" she shouted next to the old man's helmet. She hoped he'd slow down or even stop so that she could look at the flowers—and Drew could catch up.

Annie felt their moped sputter to a stop as Mr. Pipes parked at the far end of the flower market. She hopped off and admired the rows of buckets overflowing with yellow, red, green, and white.

“I wish Rome was all like this; I could stay here all day,” she said over her shoulder to Mr. Pipes.

“I understand perfectly, my dear,” said the old man, his white hair glowing in the sunshine as he took off his helmet. “The Campo de’ Fiori, or field of flowers market, is a refreshing relief from the otherwise rather sooty, gray stones and concrete jumbled about. It is like that in Rome, one-time capital of Western Civilization: dust, sweat, and general messiness give way around the next corner to beauty of the most extraordinary magnificence.”

“Oh, but here comes Drew,” said Annie.

Scowling, Drew stepped stiffly off his moped and squelched toward them, leaving a trail of water on the pavement.

“What on earth happened to you?” asked Annie.

“Oh, my dear fellow,” said Mr. Pipes. “However did you manage to get so entirely soaked?”

“Crashed,” said Drew, collapsing with a *sploosh* onto a bench.

“Into what?” asked Annie.

“A flower pot,” he said simply. “Full of water. At least it was full of water before I hit it.”

“I hope you didn’t get hurt,” said Annie with concern. “Did you crush any of the flowers?” she added, glancing at a nearby row.

“I didn’t have time to check their vital signs,” he said, frowning and rubbing his elbow. “How could I? The lady selling the flowers looked ready to feed me to the lions—she looked like one herself—and I thought I’d better scam.”

Drew paused, looking at the street shimmering with heat and bustling with traffic. Voices rose and fell from the people on the sidewalk and in the market. Everyone seemed excited about something. He shook his head at the din.

“They call this place ‘The Eternal City,’” he said doubtfully. “I must be missing something. All that seems eternal here is the noise and the heat.”

In Drew’s defense, he had spent more than a dozen hours on an airplane, where at every meal he had never had quite enough to eat. He had slept very little in the last twenty-four hours, his clothes were soaked, and his elbow hurt. The cumulative effect left Drew feeling out of sorts with the world.

“There is that, to be sure,” agreed Mr. Pipes. “But my boy, what you need is refreshment—yes, refreshment is what you need.”

Drew looked interested. The old man stroked his chin, and his generous white eyebrows worked up and down as he thought.

“I’ve got just the thing,” said Mr. Pipes, after a moment.

“What?” asked Annie and Drew.

“Follow me to the nearest Italian soda stand,” he said, strapping his helmet on. “Riding will dry your clothes.”

“In this heat,” said Annie, “they should be dry in no time.”

“Do you think they’ll have raspberry?” asked Drew, suddenly thinking more benevolent thoughts about Italy and Italians. He climbed onto his VeloSolex moped—not as powerful as Mr. Pipes and Annie’s, but legal for someone his age to ride.

“Naturally they will have raspberry, Drew,” said Mr. Pipes.

“Isn’t that everybody’s favorite?” said Annie, climbing on the moped behind Mr. Pipes.

*

Drew took a long pull on his straw and felt the bubbly sweetness of the creamy raspberry soda cooling his throat.

Mr. Pipes had led them to a sidewalk café on the Via del Colosseo. Framed by shops at the end of the street, the ruins of the ancient Colosseum loomed massive and menacing. Everything around it seemed small and insignificant.

“Ah,” said Drew, smacking his lips. “That’s better, much better. Say, did either of you smell that pizza back on the street? It was to die for.”

“Perhaps for lunch,” said Mr. Pipes with a laugh, “but it’s far too early for lunch just now.”

“Oh, just thought I’d mention it.” Drew shrugged and took another sip of his soda. Then he sat back in his chair.

“It looks so big from here,” he said. “It almost doesn’t look real. You know, more like a giant sports arena in a movie.”

“The Colosseum, you mean?” asked Mr. Pipes.

“I’m not so sure I like it,” said Annie, her eyes narrowing.

“Why not?” said Drew.

“I don’t know.”

Drew shrugged and, looking again at the ancient ruins, asked, “Who built it?”

“A-and what did they use it for?” asked Annie.

“Ah, yes, the Amphitheatrum Flavium,” said Mr. Pipes, setting his tall soda glass on the linen-covered table. “Begun by the Roman emperor Vespasian and opened for use by his son, Titus, in A.D. 80.”

“But who actually did all the work?” asked Drew. “The thing’s huge.”

“The Romans used Jewish slaves taken captive when Jerusalem fell,” replied Mr. Pipes.

“Slaves?” said Annie.

“Must have taken thousands of them,” said Drew. He drained the last of his soda, slurping loudly with his straw to get every drop.

Annie frowned at him. “But what did they use it for?” she asked again.

Mr. Pipes looked from the Colosseum to Annie and adjusted the position of his gold-rimmed half-glasses on his nose before answering her.

“Well, now, that is not the most pleasant of topics, I fear, my dear.”

“Why not?”

“Yeah,” added Drew, “didn’t they just play sports—football and stuff like that—in the Colosseum?”

“I fear not,” said Mr. Pipes. “I’ll tell you all about it whilst we go have a look.”

After locking their mopeds together near the café, Annie and Drew followed Mr. Pipes down the sidewalk toward the Colosseum.

“So this place is almost two thousand years old,” said Drew, as they came closer and the circle of the Colosseum loomed more massive above them.

“It’s huge,” said Annie, while they waited for a swirling wave of traffic to stop so that they could cross the street.

“You’re right, Annie,” said Drew. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything so gigantic in my life.”

“Tis a stupendous sight,” said Mr. Pipes. “Many believe it is the most spectacular building in Rome; some believe it the most spectacular in the world.”

Annie felt the urge to bite her fingernails. She couldn’t explain it, but something about this place made her uneasy.

“Why all the arches?” asked Drew.

“The lowest row, along the street,” said Mr. Pipes, “were entrances—eighty entrances and exits in all.”

“How about the other rows?”

“Each upper arch originally framed a statue of one of the emperors or heroes of the empire,” replied Mr. Pipes. “The entire structure used to be covered with glimmering marble, but the marble and the statues were plundered for use in many of the other buildings around Rome when the Colosseum fell out of use.”

Mr. Pipes led them through the cool shade of one of the massive arches into the bright sunshine of the interior.

“This place could have held thousands,” said Drew, as he took in the row upon row of ancient stone tiers rising in circles all around them. Lush grass now grew in places where emperor and commoner had been entertained together.

“Through the eighty arches streamed more than fifty thousand eager spectators,” said Mr. Pipes. “With all those entrances it took only ten minutes to find a seat, and then the show began.”

“Wh-what show?” asked Annie.

“Yeah, where’s the field?” asked Drew. “I expected to see a big, flat, open field, you know, like a football field. But there’s just all these old stone walls—reminds me of some kind of maze. You could get lost in there.”

Mr. Pipes said nothing, but led them higher up the ancient steps for a better view.

“All those cages you see today,” he said, stopping and sitting down on a slab of marble, “were covered in a heavy wooden floor with trapdoors, mechanical lifts, and winches, allowing the Romans to open and close cages—and dungeons—and to rearrange the entire arena.”

“Sort of like stage sets?” asked Drew.

“Something along those lines, I suppose,” said Mr. Pipes soberly.

Annie looked at the old man’s eyes. She had grown close to Mr. Pipes on their adventures; she sometimes felt as though she could read his thoughts. He stared out over the ruined arena with a look that Annie had seen on his face before. They sat quietly for several minutes.

“What used to happen here—long ago?” asked Annie, sitting down next to the old man and slipping her hand into his. “It looks like you’re watching it in your mind.”

He smiled at Annie.

“The Colosseum was a place of horrible violence and cruelty,” he began, “and all in the name of entertainment—but at such great cost. People flocked here for free bread and circuses to jeer and hoot as creatures died.”

“Creatures?” said Drew.

“Y-you mean animals were killed here for entertainment?” asked Annie. “Cats? Like Lord Underfoot and Lady Kitty?” She

thought back on Mr. Pipes's large gray cat, king of the castle at Mr. Pipes's old cottage on the river; and she remembered rescuing Lady Kitty under a bridge in Germany and later giving her to little Henri on the farm in Switzerland. She missed both of them terribly.

"Much bigger cats than they," said Mr. Pipes. "The Roman love of munera—blood sports—was legendary in the history of the world. Lions, tigers, elephants, giraffes, hippos, even horses were released from those cages under the movable floor, and gladiators—mostly slaves and prisoners—armed with sword and shield would fight the animals to the death. When Emperor Titus opened the Colosseum in A.D. 80, he held one hundred days of blood sports, wherein, it is said, five thousand animals died before a delighted mob."

"That's awful," said Annie. "I can't imagine anything worse. Didn't anyone feel sorry for the animals?"

"At first, no doubt, some still pitied them," replied Mr. Pipes. "One of our great poets described the slide into vice and decadence this way—"

"Is it a hymn?" asked Drew.

"Not this time," replied Mr. Pipes. "It is a poem about a monster."

"Cool!" said Drew.

"Wait," said Annie, opening her sketchbook and turning to a clean page. "I want to get it down."

Mr. Pipes smiled and then recited:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
 As to be hated needs but to be seen.
 Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
 We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

"So some folks," said Drew, "didn't like it—the blood sports—at first, but they put up with it, and after seeing it for a while, they eventually liked it. Is that how it works?"

“Yes, my boy,” said Mr. Pipes. “But as they watched, they became bored with just seeing animals killed. It is always that way with entertainment; it dulls our appreciation of constant things whilst awakening an ever-increasing craving for passing thrills. Their lust for blood increased; they had to see greater violence and cruelty. Seeing animals killed was not enough.”

“Wh-what do you mean?” asked Annie.

Mr. Pipes looked at Annie with sad eyes before he continued. He breathed a heavy sigh, and went on.

“The crowds demanded more blood—human blood. And soon gladiators with swords, nets, and tridents entered the arena to fight with one another.”

“To fight with real swords?” said Drew. “Just to fight?”

Drew couldn’t help himself; it all sounded kind of exciting. He gazed down on the arena and then back at their old friend. He could never admit his excitement to Mr. Pipes, though.

Mr. Pipes glanced at Drew and then gazed down at the ruins of cages and dungeons at the base of the Colosseum before continuing.

Annie stood up and followed Mr. Pipes’s gaze. She turned quickly away.

“Mostly, they fought to the death,” he said quietly.

“In front of all those people?” asked Drew, running his eyes around the massive circle and imagining it filled with a frenzied, jeering mob. “You see murder with actors on TV, but this was the real thing?”

“Oh, most real indeed, Drew,” replied Mr. Pipes. “Blood and violence on TV and in movies grows worse in an attempt to satisfy exactly the same sinful craving for sensational thrills: blood—real blood—for the Romans, special-effects blood for us. But the net result is a dulling of pity for others and a dulling of wholesome desire.

“When the combat reached a stand, usually because one gladiator fell wounded,” continued Mr. Pipes, “the screaming crowds raised or lowered their thumbs as a gesture of their will

for him to live or die. More often than not, these stones echoed with, 'Kill him, kill him!' And if the emperor agreed, the poor soul was slain whilst the pitiless mobs derived their pleasure from the miserable suffering and cruel death of another human being."

"Let me get this straight," said Drew, blinking and shaking his head as if to clear some thought too awful to contemplate. "This all happened right here?"

Annie felt numb and bit her lip; she stared in revulsion at the ruined edifice.

"Oh, I'm afraid it is all very true, indeed," said Mr. Pipes. "But that is not all, my dears."

"What could possibly be worse than that?" asked Annie, barely trusting herself to ask.

"The Romans turned their appetite toward new victims," said Mr. Pipes quietly. "They called the followers of our Lord Jesus atheists because Christians refused to worship the many Roman gods. Worse yet, for their refusal to worship the emperor as 'Lord and God,' Christians were labeled traitors. Nero, sixth emperor of Rome, in A.D. 67 commenced the first wave of persecution of our brothers and sisters. Something of a madman, Nero burned the city of Rome whilst playing merrily on his fiddle, then proceeded to punish Christians for his misdeeds. His violence against Christians was so terrible that many otherwise loyal Romans were repulsed by it."

"Wh-what did he do to them?" asked Drew.

"He dressed some in robes dipped in wax; then he tied them to trees and set them on fire, like human candles, to provide lighting for the evening garden parties held at his extravagant palace, Domus Aurea, just across the way."

"Alive?" asked Drew. Mr. Pipes nodded.

Annie shuddered.

"Along with many nameless thousands," continued Mr. Pipes, "he also killed the apostles Peter and Paul here in Rome."

“That must have really hurt the spread of Christianity,” said Drew. “I mean, who would be a Christian if he knew that the government could kill him just for being one?”

“Oh, quite the contrary, my boy,” said Mr. Pipes. “Within a short time, the apostles and missionaries had carried the good news—on Roman-built roads—throughout the empire; Christianity often advanced most in the midst of great persecution. Whilst executing Christians, Roman military officers were converted because of the faithful witness of the persecuted; senators and slaves, people from every walk of life, came to faith in the risen, conquering Lord Jesus—all whilst hatred and cruelty against Christians raged on every side.”

“Here?” asked Annie, hoarsely. “Were Christians actually killed here in this arena?”

“Yes, and in hundreds like it built for the same purpose throughout the Roman world,” answered Mr. Pipes. “Old men, saintly women—even children were torn to pieces and devoured by lions and other wild beasts. Oh, yes, indeed; right here they shed their blood for their loyalty to Christ.”

“Wasn’t there any way out?” asked Drew.

“Certainly,” said Mr. Pipes. “All they had to do was worship the emperor, but to do this meant denying Christ.

“A faithful Christian named Ignatius, leader of the church in Antioch, and the man who introduced antiphonal singing in church, was arrested and brought here. He said before his death, ‘Let fire and cross, let companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!’ They placed him down there, in the arena.” Mr. Pipes nodded his white head toward the labyrinth of now-exposed dungeons.

“Even from where we sit, the mobs sprang to their feet, jeering and mocking Ignatius as they waited impatiently for his bloody death. Suddenly, with an ominous clattering, levers and winches ground into motion; the sand-covered floor gaped

open in several places; everyone held his cruel breath in anticipation. Then, roaring with delight, the brutal crowds watched hungry lions bolt from their cages and fall upon the man whose only crime was loyalty to King Jesus. Someone recorded Ignatius's last words, spoken moments before he was devoured: 'I am the wheat of Christ: I am about to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread.'

Annie blinked, trying to see through the mist welling up in her eyes. Drew ground his teeth together and breathed heavily. He felt afraid—and ashamed.

Mr. Pipes went on and told them the story of the apostle John's disciple Polycarp, arrested and ordered by the Roman proconsul to "Reproach Christ. Swear, and I will release you." The old man replied before they tied him to the stake, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how shall I blaspheme my King, who has saved me?"

Drew gazed at the shimmering heat waves rising from the ruins across the arena. He wanted to have that kind of faith—to be able to say and do the right thing, no matter what. But it was hard.

"You said women and children died for the Lord Jesus," said Annie.

"Many thousands whose names, this side of heaven, we will never know," said Mr. Pipes. "And some whose names and stories we do know."

He went on and told them of the slave girl Blandina, whom none of the wild beasts would touch. He told them of her faithfulness to the end under unimaginable sufferings; of the death of Ponticus, a boy of fifteen; of the virtuous woman Julitta, tortured and killed along with her baby; of thirteen-year-old Agnus, beheaded for her refusal to deny Christ.

Just then an American tour guide stopped nearby and spoke to a cluster of tourists: "Now, I know you've all heard that Christians were thrown to the lions in Roman arenas. Well—" she laughed—"well, let me assure you, more recent historical research

proves that reports of Christians devoured by lions have been greatly exaggerated. In fact, it's likely that no Christians ever met death here—probably Roman officials found that the lions preferred—ah, shall we say, more *tender* meals than Christians.”

The group of tourists erupted in laughter as they moved down the steps and out of earshot.

Hot tears stung Annie's cheeks; she brushed them away with her hand and bit her knuckle until it hurt.

Drew clenched his fists and rose to his feet, still breathing heavily. He stared hard after the laughing crowd.

Mr. Pipes looked over his glasses at them both.

“It took great patience to suffer what so many did suffer for our Lord. We are not called at this moment to be misused by lions for our Savior, but we must patiently bear the misuse and mockery of the world. May we do so, my dears, with patience and so honor our Lord Jesus.”

“How did they do it?” asked Annie.

“Do what, my dear?”

“Stay true to the Lord,” she answered, biting her lower lip.

Mr. Pipes studied Annie's wide eyes. In them he saw pity for those who had suffered so terribly, and he saw flickers of terror as she thought about dying in such ways.

“Ah, my dear,” he began, patting her gently on the shoulder, “those early Christians bore one another's burdens, strengthening each other in their mutual trials.”

“But how?” she persisted.

“It was the church,” replied Mr. Pipes. “God's children, from the days of the apostles, gathered faithfully on the first day of the week—the Christian Sabbath—to pray, sing, worship, and listen to the Lord's voice in the preaching of his Word, and to partake of the Lord's Supper. Honoring their Lord together on his day gave them the strength to honor him in their mortal pain on the day of their death.”

“But how could they do all that,” asked Drew, “when Roman officials wanted to arrest them and throw them to the lions?”

“When persecution was less severe, they met openly in churches. When that was unsafe, they met in house churches and even in caves and catacombs—quite literally underground.”

“But it was still dangerous for them to meet,” said Annie.

“Oh, very much so indeed, my dear,” agreed Mr. Pipes. “But the greater the persecution, the greater the need to join together in prayer and praise before the Lord.”

“But things like singing,” said Drew, “would give them away, wouldn’t it?”

“Sometimes it did, no doubt. Nevertheless, the early church sang, be sure of it.”

“What did they sing?” asked Annie.

“Yeah, they didn’t have Watts and Wesley,” added Drew.

“Of course they sang the psalms, like God’s people of old,” replied Mr. Pipes. “And there are a number of passages of Holy Scripture in the New Testament that must surely have been hymns sung by those earliest Christians.”

Mr. Pipes got up and began climbing higher up the steps toward the upper tier of the Colosseum. The children followed.

“What Scriptures did they sing?” asked Drew, wiping perspiration from his forehead.

Mr. Pipes paused on the steps in thought and then, resuming his steady climbing, said, “Revelation 15:3–4, a very psalm-like text, most surely was sung. Imagine these sacred strains rising from those cages. Moments before our Christian brothers and sisters faced the rage of evildoers and their entrance into the heavenly city.” He turned and gestured below to the arena, then lifted his hands heavenward and said,

Great and marvelous are thy works,

O Lord God Almighty;

Righteous and true are thy ways,

Thou King of the ages.

Who shall fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name?

For thou alone art holy;

For all the nations shall come and worship before thee;
For thy righteous acts have been made manifest.

Annie looked down at the broken arena, trying to imagine it all. “So do you really think they sang from their prisons before,” asked Annie, “well, you know, before they were killed?”

“Surely they did,” said Mr. Pipes. “When Paul and Barnabas lay chained to their guards, they sang hymns through the night. And Christians, in trial or in triumph, have sung their praise and worship ever since. Maybe they sang responsively, as Ignatius taught his congregations in Antioch before his death here in Rome.”

Annie gazed at the arena and imagined Christians’ voices rising in song from dungeon to dungeon. “What about hymns that aren’t in the Bible?” she asked. “Did the early Christians actually write poetry to the Lord and sing it?”

“Ah, Annie, a poet’s question, indeed,” said Mr. Pipes, smiling tenderly at her.

Before answering, he led them along a curving row of grass near the top of the Colosseum. The circle of the ruined edifice yawned widely, and the tourists looked like ants crawling around on the ruins far below. From around a bend in the ancient stone bleachers, a black wooden cross came into view. A moment later, Mr. Pipes stopped at the base of the cross and carefully took off his tweed jacket.

Annie stared at Mr. Pipes’s clean white shirt and black necktie. Proper Mr. Pipes never took off his tweed jacket, no matter what activity they did with him—even fishing. But then, she couldn’t remember its ever being this hot on their other adventures.

“We must find shade,” said the old man, wiping his brow again. “Dr. Dudley will give me what-for if I remain in this sun any longer.”

“Are you feeling sick?” said Annie, taking his arm and frowning with concern.

“Here, I’ll carry your shoulder bag and coat,” said Drew, glancing uneasily at their old friend.

“Now, don’t you two go doting on my frailties,” he said with a chuckle and a dismissive wave of his hand. “I feel perfectly fine—fine, that is, for my years.”

They settled on the grass under the shadow of the worn stones of a nearby arch. Annie leaned against the warm stones and studied Mr. Pipes’s face.

“I say, this is much better,” he said, folding his jacket and using it for a pillow against the base of the stone arch.

“You’re sure?” asked Annie.

“Truly, my dears,” insisted the old man. “I forbid you to worry over my health.”

“We’re way up here!” said Drew, squinting down at the arena.

“These would have been the cheap seats,” said Mr. Pipes. “Where the plebeians strained to see the gory spectacle far below.”

“If I had to come,” said Annie, shivering in spite of the heat, “I would have liked it better up here—it would seem less real.”

Drew looked at his sister, then at Mr. Pipes.

“We’d have been down there,” he said simply, nodding at the arena.

Annie bit her lip but made no reply.

Mr. Pipes looked at Annie’s face and continued: “Christians from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Rome to Alexandria, faced dying for their faith. And one important way they united their hearts to bear their sufferings was by singing hymns.”

“So maybe persecution actually encouraged poets to write hymns,” said Annie.

“Indeed it did, my dear,” said Mr. Pipes.

“Alexandria.” Drew said the name slowly. “Was that a city named after that guy, what’s-his-name? Alexander the—the Big?”

“The Great,” corrected Annie.

“Someone called him Alexander the Pig,” said Mr. Pipes with a laugh, “for the way he gobbled up other nations and states—Shakespeare, I believe it was. But yes, Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. Eventually, Alexandria developed the greatest library of the ancient world and became the center of learning, with schools formed to teach every major philosophy and religion in the empire.”

“So is that where the first poet learned to write poetry?” asked Annie.

“Some historians consider Alexandria the birthplace of noninspired hymnody. And sometime after A.D. 170, during a lull in persecution, a young man named Clement, yearning for knowledge, arrived in the city. He unexpectedly fell under the teachings of Christ at a school, and found his hunger for knowledge satisfied in the fear of the Lord—the beginning of wisdom. Later, he was appointed to be headmaster of the Christian school, where many students came under his teaching, including the early church father Origen. Clement wrote a book called *The Tutor*, wherein he described Christ, the ultimate teacher, and the children whom Christ teaches and his method of teaching them. After detailing considerable guidelines on Christian conduct for children, he concluded with a poem called ‘A Hymn of the Savior.’ Many consider it the oldest Christian hymn not taken directly from the words of the Bible.”

Mr. Pipes paused and smiled at Annie and Drew.

Annie looked up at him from her leather sketchbook, a gift from Mr. Pipes last Christmas. And what a Christmas that had been. Mr. Pipes persuaded their parents for the first time to actually listen to the gospel. And she knew he prayed faithfully for her family. For this and so much more, she had come to feel a growing sense that Mr. Pipes was more than just a friend to them; he had become like a spiritual grandfather. She knew that Drew felt the same way.

“Oh, don’t stop there,” she begged. “How does it go?”

The old man opened his leather shoulder bag, drew out his hymnal, and, after adjusting his glasses, opened to the hymn. Drew looked over his shoulder at the words, and Annie studied Mr. Pipes’s face as he began reading. She loved the way he read poetry, especially poetry filled with passionate praise. Mr. Pipes read in what Drew had come to call his all-or-nothing voice:

Shepherd of tender youth,
Guiding in love and truth
Through devious ways:
Christ, our triumphant King,
We come thy Name to sing;
Hither our children bring,
To shout thy praise.

Eyebrows raised, he looked over the tops of his glasses at Annie and Drew. “Hither our children bring . . .” he mused to himself. Could they know how much he cared for them, he wondered, how fond he had become of them?

He continued reading:

Thou art our holy Lord,
The all-subduing Word,
Healer of strife:
Thou didst thyself abase,
That from sin’s deep disgrace
Thou mightest save our race,
And give us life.

Thou art the Great High Priest,
Thou hast prepared a feast
Of heav’nly love—

He stopped and said: “Now, my dear ones, think of those martyrs—men and boys; the matron and the maid—who faced dying in this place, and in hundreds of arenas like this one, and called on the Lord for help and found him ever faithful.

While in our mortal pain,
None call on thee in vain:
Help thou dost not disdain,
Help from above.

Ever be thou our Guide,
Our Shepherd and our Pride,
Our Staff and Song:
Jesus, thou Christ of God,
By thy perennial Word,
Lead us where thou hast trod;
Make our faith strong.

So now and till we die,
Sound we thy praises high,
And joyful sing:
Infants, and the glad throng
Who to thy church belong,
Unite to swell the song
To Christ our King.”

They sat silent for several moments, letting the words sink into their souls.

“It sounds like a hymn a Christian teacher would write,” said Annie at last.

“He does sound pretty interested in kids,” agreed Drew, digging in his knapsack distractedly.

“But it would be unfair to give Clement all the credit; he received considerable help from his American translator, Henry

Martyn Dexter,” said Mr. Pipes. “Dexter, not only a good theologian, was clearly a gifted poet. In 1846, whilst preparing a sermon on the early church, he wrote this tender hymn using Clement’s Greek poem as the basis.”

“B-but what finally happened to Clement?” asked Annie, afraid to hear the answer.

“I fear that we do not know,” replied Mr. Pipes. “Persecution of Christians resumed around A.D. 202, of which he wrote, ‘Many martyrs are daily burned, confined, or beheaded, before our eyes.’ He apparently fled Alexandria soon thereafter, but beyond that, very little is known of him.”

Annie read the last lines of the hymn over again to herself: “Infants, and the glad throng / Who to thy church belong”—*what could that mean?*, she wondered. But before she could ask, Drew groaned:

“Oh! I’m dying of hunger! My stomach thinks my throat’s been cut. Oh, Mr. Pipes, it’s just gotta be past lunchtime—way past.”

Mr. Pipes smiled at Drew as he wiped his glasses on his handkerchief and mopped perspiration from his brow. Drew, who was almost always dying of hunger, was no reliable measure of mealtimes.

“Yes, my boy, and we’ve lost our shade. Let us find a cool place for our first Italian midday meal.”

“Lead the way!” said Drew, helping their friend to his feet.

*

In the courtyard of a nearby pizzeria, Mr. Pipes and Annie and Drew listened to the music of water gurgling from the mouth of a stone fish as it fell into a small pool. Above them, the muscular arms of wisteria seemed caught in a perpetual wrestling match with the trellis that filtered the sun and shaded the garden dining area from the afternoon heat.

Annie closed her eyes and inhaled the perfume dropping from the purple blossoms overhead.

“Oh, those flowers smell like heaven!” she said.

Drew glanced at his sister.

“Yeah, it smells like heaven,” he agreed. “But that’s *pizza* you smell.”

He closed his eyes and sniffed the air: basil, tomato sauce, baking cheeses, and fresh pizza crust wafted from the brick ovens in the kitchen. His mouth watered and his stomach growled. Maybe Italy’s not so bad after all, he decided. Staring hungrily at the table covered in starched linen and laid for serious eating, he fidgeted with his fork.

Then it arrived. A waiter set a plate-sized pizza in front of each of them. Drew swallowed several times as he stared in anticipation at the mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses, browned to perfection, smothering thick slices of Italian sausage.

Mr. Pipes folded his hands, bowed his white head, and offered thanks:

Thou art the Great High Priest,
Thou hast prepared a feast
Of heav’nly love . . .

The children joined Mr. Pipes in a hearty “Amen!” Mr. Pipes lifted his head and, tucking his linen napkin under his chin, took up his knife and fork.

Drew dove into his pizza like someone who hadn’t eaten for weeks.

Nodding at Annie’s plate, Mr. Pipes said, “Do fall to, my dear. I fear what might befall us if Drew finishes eating before we even make a beginning!”