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TO SAVE A LIFE AND RESTORE A COMMUNITY

RUST

THE NOVEL

"ABSORBINGLY HUMAN"
GREG WRIGHT, CHRISTIANCINEMA.COM
ON RUST, THE MOVIE

CORBIN BERNSEN

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Rust: The Novel

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Dedication

For Father and Mother always.

What People are Saying
About *Rust* the Movie

“a shining story of rediscovering faith”

~Francine Brokaw of Family Magazine
Group

“...all the elements of a great mystery with a
helping of faith.”

~ Dana Chaffin, Godandscience.org

“...spiritually uplifting and clearly shows that
God will not forsake you and that His promises
will be fulfilled. Dove is pleased to award *Rust* our
Dove Seal for ages 12 and over.”

~Dove Reviews, dove.org

“...mature and engrossing...Anyone who likes a
mystery should be up for this.”

~Greg Wright, Christiancinema.com

1

James Moore forced himself to blink. "I've tried. But this has to be a two-way street, and if you can't answer my simplest questions, help me at least understand where I've fallen short in your eyes..."

Silence.

Emotion balled in his throat, momentarily choked his breath. He lowered his head. The hands resting in his lap—not resting, wrung together—belonged to an old man. So many years gone, and now it had come to this? A shattered relationship that should have lasted a lifetime. He lifted his head and stared into those glassy eyes. "How can we fix this? How can we fix us...?"

Silence.

Dust motes danced in the sunbeam streaming through the window, the shaft of light mocking the darkness within him, the twirling specks oddly reminding him of a time when sitting in this humble place made him

happy.

That was not today, though.

He turned his attention back to the person responsible for his tattered existence. "You're shoving me away! Don't you understand that?"

Silence.

Fear clamped its fist around his heart. Was this truly the end? What would he do?

...And like Job, a man who experienced enough pain for a hundred men, we too have our hurdles in life that seem to take great and often unfair pleasure in watching us stumble as we try to get over them...

Pastor Barrow's long-ago words filtered into James's memory. At one time, he'd believed he could clear any hurdle as long as God was with him. Now he wasn't so sure. Wasn't sure he could clear the pain. Wasn't sure God was with him. Wasn't sure about...anything.

He swallowed the lump in his throat, but it immediately returned—just one more hurdle he couldn't clear.

He lifted his gaze to those eyes again. "I love you. No less than the day I came to know you, but if you refuse to be here with me, speak to me, then I have no choice but to walk away." He despised the whine in his voice. Begging never looked good, and felt even worse. He'd

given up everything for this relationship. Everything. It ending this way wasn't fair.

...But we pick ourselves up, dust off our hands and plant new seeds creating new hope. And we do so not really knowing His plan or what He has in store, but having the patience and faith to believe the reward is well worth the wait.

James shook off the memory. Regret, uncertainty, guilt converged in his gut, thick as dense fog, to cloud his resolve. Should he wait? If he gave up now, he'd lose himself; somewhere deep down, he knew that. But another part of him knew he was already lost. He had to let go. If he didn't, he'd never find himself again.

Maybe God wanted him to go.

Maybe leaving was part of God's plan...

Maybe it wasn't.

Unshed tears clouded his vision as he focused on the statue of a pleading Jesus, arms outstretched as if beckoning James into an embrace. Strange how begging seemed so pathetic when James did it, but so merciful when it came from Jesus. He'd thought he understood what that statue symbolized—the Lord's desire to embrace all, to forgive all, to befriend all—but lately James felt as though Jesus were giving him the cold shoulder. The

arms on the statue might be open, but the real, live Jesus had barred His arms tight across His chest to shut James out completely, and the rejection was killing him.

There was only one solution.

He slid from the pew, stood. "I'm sorry. I can't continue like this."

He waited. Waited for the inspiration to stay. Waited for the strength to leave. Waited for any directive.

Silence.

He closed his eyes, trapped salty liquid behind eyelids heavy with grief. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "Forgive me." Turning his back on the statue, he escaped into the winter landscape of the heritage site.

The old ball field's chain-link batting cage rose into the sky, and James stood for a moment, lost in the past, seeing the children of days gone by playing games, running and shouting. Proud fathers stood behind the fence, cheering the kids. He stared, his mind swamping the plea he'd just uttered to the God he'd lost.

A kaleidoscope rushed through his memory, his mother, sitting beside him in church, listening to the preacher. He and the neighbor boy, riding a too-big bike. Watching football on their old black and white TV.

Christmases, playing hockey, all of his childhood in this small town crashed through his brain. He suddenly found himself transported to the middle of the hockey rink, lost in the past as if he'd traveled down a road and not remembered the last few miles. He replayed the days when he'd been happy just to be with his dad, when his mother had bought them cowboy hats and they'd all climbed on the tractor, Mom holding his baby sister as Dad had furrowed the rows.

And then there was the day his mother died...the minister's quiet words, his father's withdrawal, his sister's tears. His own soundless cry to heaven, wanting to know why. James couldn't go there just yet. He jerked back to the present.

Breathing in crisp winter air, he focused on the other relocated relics of his childhood, and barely gave a thought to the neatly folded black shirt he'd left on the hardwood pew—or the thin white clergy tab that had defined so much of him.

~*~

James strong-armed the steering wheel of his old pickup as wind buffeted the rusted blue steel. Windshield wipers worked double-time

to keep snow flurries off the glass. Through the rearview mirror, he glanced back at the church heritage site. Ice and snow seemed to have frozen everything in history. Like the preserved buildings, his childhood triumphs on the Little League diamond, football field, hockey rink, stood motionless in his mind, just cold sculptures of joys he would never feel again.

The sun cut through the clouds offering a sliver of golden light; a possibility that this confusion, depression—whatever it was James was feeling—was only a temporary state. The timing of the show of light wasn't lost on him, and a slight twinge at the corners of his mouth almost made his lips turn upward. God certainly did move in mysterious ways—or at least, James'd think so if he wasn't convinced God was on vacation.

He glanced in the rearview mirror. Sunlight glinted off bleachers that lined the football field, bringing with it more memories. He'd loved playing sports. Didn't matter which. Baseball. Football. Hockey. He was good at them all and had the constant support of the town and his family. Superman in a world with no kryptonite.

The mental image of his father whooping and hollering, proud as any man or father could be pierced James with a double-edged

blade. They'd been close then, before James had done whatever he'd done to rile his dad and create the divide between them that had dominated the last forty years. James cherished those memories of his father's love; but now those same remembrances ate him up inside. "Strained" was a sugar-coated description of a relationship as shattered as the one James now shared with his Heavenly Father.

More irony for him to tuck away and ponder later. Now wasn't the time for deep thoughts. He just wanted to get home. Who knew, maybe things would be different with Dad. Maybe he'd gotten over himself and would greet James with open arms and a fatted calf.

A grey pallor suddenly dulled the landscape as storm clouds usurped the sunlight once again.

OK, then. Message received.

The truck lurched, sending James's heart into momentary arrhythmia. He downshifted and slowed a few clicks per hour. The tires found purchase on the icy asphalt, and his heart found its steady beat. James cleared his mind and focused on the rhythmic tick of the wipers as the road disappeared beneath his tires. Keeping his mind clear of distracting memories was probably a good idea. Especially when he

had so much of the present to manage.

As the cemetery came into view, James slowed the truck even more and then eased between the open gates. Sadness stalked him as he killed the engine and stepped onto undisturbed snowfall. The passage of forty-some-odd years didn't make coming here any easier. His mother's death had also marked the beginning of the end of his relationship with his father.

Wind buffeted his neck as he made his way to the grave. He shrugged a little deeper into the warmth of his favorite jacket—the only thing besides memories and faded photos that he had of his mother. How many times had she nagged him to do up the zipper? How many times had he sighed and rolled his eyes?

For her sake, he tugged on the slider, brought it a little closer to his chin. The action warmed him. Whether it was the thick fleece shutting out more of the wind or the memory of his mother, he didn't know. Maybe it was a combination of both.

He closed his eyes and listened to silence. Peace washed over him. Snow dusted his face, weighted his eyelashes for the brief moment it took to melt onto his cheeks, but the arctic chill did not disturb him. He opened his eyes to the snow-covered headstone that told anyone who

cared to know that his mom had been a loving wife and mother. All true. Etched in granite for a lifetime. He smiled. He was glad to be home. The familiar made him feel safe even in the midst of all the turmoil that awaited.

He could do this, rejoin his family. He'd start fresh, renew his family ties. He'd find old friends and cement new relationships with them, catch up on the past and go forward into the future. A tiny seed of hope for a new beginning took root in his heart.

He glanced at a plot of newly dug graves. Matching headstones and surnames told James who they were. With her voice husky and somber, his sister had told him about the fire—no, “The Fire.” Important. Capitalized. Emphasized. The only fire to define the entire town in all Kipling's history.

Such tragedy. He hadn't known the Pearces, but their deaths affected him just the same. He still had a hard time believing Travis had set a fire that burned up an entire family. Travis was such a gentle and innocent, beautiful soul. A person who built up others. He didn't have a destructive urge. At least, that's the way James remembered Travis.

Could his childhood best friend have changed so drastically—from beauty to beast—in James's absence?

He hoped not. But then, James had changed. Wasn't that why he was home in the first place? Because he'd had a change of heart. Had Travis lost his heart and his mind? Had he gone crazy? James stopped his thoughts. Standing in a cemetery communing with the soul of his mother wasn't the time for deep philosophical examination of Travis...or himself. Right now, he couldn't deal with what happened to Travis or his own reasons for being back home. He had other concerns to take care of, other people to see.

He said a final word to his mother and then made his way back to the truck.

Time to face his father.

2

The clink of stainless steel flatware against dishwasher-safe dinner plates clashed against the rhythmic ticking of the hall clock and disturbed the awful silence.

Had James really thought he was glad to be home? What happened to his family? This tense quiet wasn't what he was used to. These people sitting with him at the table were like strangers, like characters in some made-for-TV movie, dining in state, as if the smallest sound from any of them would break an unspoken rule with dire consequences.

He glanced at his sister as she forked a broccoli spear. She didn't look up from her plate. He wanted to start a conversation but couldn't think of a safe subject. Pick the wrong topic, and the silence wouldn't be the only disturbed thing in the room.

The weather? Hockey? School? He couldn't see any of those being good conversation starters. He didn't have a job yet, so he couldn't discuss that, either. He couldn't

expound on the farm, winter was a time of rest, with little going except repairs. Repairs he hadn't helped his father with yet. Censure would follow if he brought that up.

Across from Mary, Ian sat sullen, picking at his food as if he might find bugs in it. Had James been like that at fourteen? Probably. Everything good about that year had been erased by the death of his mother. He imagined he'd been sullen. He knew he'd been confused...and empty. The vacuum borne by her departure wasn't filled, even to this day. Maybe that's why he'd failed in his vocation. How many times had he preached that God could erase all loneliness, heal all pain, calm all anger—if we let Him.

James hadn't let Him.

He had to be honest with himself. He *believed* God could do all those things, *intended* to let Him do them. Faith in that very promise was what led James to the ministry in the first place. But a part of him was afraid that if he healed completely, he'd forget her, and she'd truly be gone forever.

The revelation startled him. He *was* afraid, not *had been* afraid. Was his faith so paper-thin that he'd just been going through the motions all these years? *God, I hope not...I-I'm so sorry.* No wonder Jesus had stopped speaking to him.

He'd never let God in—not completely. Instead, he'd clung to his mother's memory as if it were the life preserver, and the pain and anger he harbored at her abandonment had fueled his direction—away from one unyielding father and towards a loving Heavenly One, or so James had thought. In reality, he'd drifted from both.

Had James's father sunken into that abyss, too? Did he believe God had taken his wife? It was a common belief amongst those who grieved that a loving God wouldn't tear lives asunder, and therefore, God must not be loving. James thought back on the times when his mother was alive, thought about the father he'd known then. Glen Moore had always been a reserved sort, but he'd smiled often when his vivacious wife goaded him into having fun. And he'd been a proud father, present at all the events James and Mary had participated in, often leaving his work early to be there. James remembered his father sometimes driving that tractor through a field at night in order to finish what he'd interrupted.

He started to look across the table at his dad but decided to avoid eye contact. The old man might sense James's inner turmoil, and that wouldn't make for appetizing dinner conversation. He was certain his father's silence