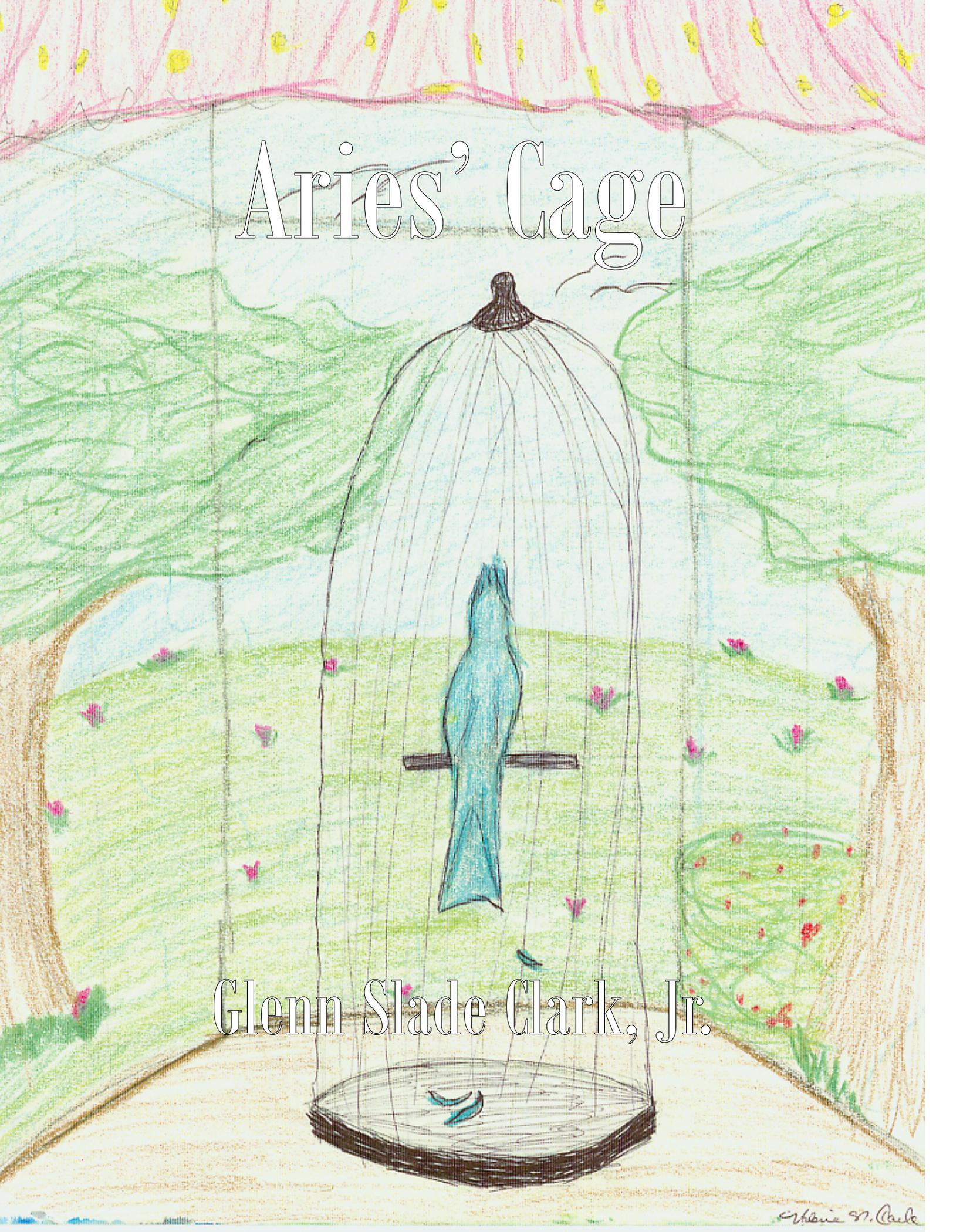


Aries' Cage



Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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There once was a beautiful songbird named Aries, who lived in a garden of flowers and trees. The trees were his home: the highest trees of all. The flowers were a beauty near matched to his own. Aries was by far the finest bird in the garden. His feathers were colored with the brilliance of all things living, his speed

was unmatched by even the fiercest of winds, and his song was so mystical that it brought the very trees to joyous tears.

Aries loved to fly, more than anything else, and he loved to sing and roost high in the trees. He loved to race with his friends through the air—fierce like an angel. He always won, but the race itself was all the pleasure there was. It was even a pleasure to lose to this Aries.

Aries' best friend was a dull-colored songbird named Sparrow. Sparrow loved Aries, and Aries loved him. Every night, when the sun had gone down, Aries and Sparrow would fly to the highest branch of the highest tree, and they would sing to the stars and look down at the world. They would drift into sleep, and there they

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would find only dreams of beauty and freedom and never-ending flight.

It happened one day that a beautiful, young girl wandered into the garden. Aries noticed her glamour, and so did young Sparrow. It was Aries, however, who won her fair gaze. He flew round her head with songs of her beauty. He flew through the air with the speed of a god. The girl loved him instantly, and she gave him his name.

The days came and went, and Aries never failed to find his lovely maiden, waiting for him in the garden. He brought her fresh flowers and his song every day. The girl loved his song like nothing she'd heard. It was Aries that kept her returning to the garden.

As time went on, Aries did all that he could to convince his fair maiden to climb to the treetops and see the world at its best. She always refused. She did not like the heights. She convinced Aries, in fact, to avoid them himself.

The girl's love for Aries grew, as did his love for her. She at last asked him to go home with her. She promised him a swing, and her company for all time. Aries was elated! He loved her so truly, and he wanted to please her. To please her, was to please himself. He sang songs of pure joy and flew high into the sky! When he returned to her hand, the girl scolded him for getting so far from her sight.

Aries begged her with song. He begged her to run; to race with him to her cottage at the edge of the flora.

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No was her answer. She did not like to sweat. So he flew by her side at a somber, slow pace. He kept up his song, though—his beautiful song. After all, he would be with his lady for all days to come.

They arrived at her cottage, and she showed him the swing. It was a magnificent swing with pure golden chains that held it from the top of a shimmering, small cage. The cage sat on a grand windowsill, from which the entire garden could be seen. Aries was happy, and he perched on his swing. He was happy to know that he had pleased his dear friend.

Aries perched on the swing, inside of the cage, and his heart raced with joy and the songs he could sing. He sang of the garden stretched out in the distance. He sang of his damsel, who loved him so truly. A few mi-

nutes later, the girl closed the door. The cage was his home now. He'd fly never more.

Aries was startled. He knew not what to think. Surely a cage was no place for his song. He knew the girl loved him. He knew he loved her. Still he wanted to fly, and to love her outside.

The nights were then changed from beauty to beast. Aries found nothing to see but a sheet. The girl always told him how much she did love him. She patted his head through gold bars, and she wished him sweet dreams. Then, off to bed, she covered his cage with that sheet. The stars were no more, and the world through the sheet could never be seen. At night, Aries did not sing. He dreamt of his prison and its conflict with his love. He could not break free, for it may cause

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her to cry. Aries could not stand to cause any tears. His joy would have died if he'd brought her to that.

Aries tried to be joyful, he tried to sing well. Day after day, he tried and he tried. He could not stand to fail, and he'd fail if she cried.

One day, at last, Sparrow returned to him. He perched on the windowsill outside of Aries' cage. Aries at once burst into his song; his wonderful song of friendship and love. Sparrow was happy, and he joined in good harmony. It was a beautiful melody, and songbirds from all over the garden came to listen to their euphonious duet.

When the young girl caught an earful, she scared them all off with a broom. She wanted no one to hear him, except for herself. She wanted no one to see him,

except for herself. Aries watched as his friends flew away. He watched helplessly, and he refused to complain. He watched them soar through the air and race like little comets. He watched Sparrow win, and his heart fell to sorrow. As his friends spread their wings, he sat still on his swing. They sang of true joy, while his song told a lie. Still, he loved the girl, and he knew she loved him. He only wished that she would let him be free. After that day, the girl kept the shutters closed.

As the days passed, Aries grew listless. The life he once knew had been taken away by one he held dear—far more than any other. Day after day, he sat in his cage. He rocked on his swing, he sang to the girl. He looked at the walls, and he dreamt without stars.

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It happened one day, Aries stood it no more. The heart that once beat with such vigor and glee broke at the knowledge...he would never be free. Colder than ice, Aries fell from his swing. He lost his last breath, and his soul did not sing.

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of three books. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is the youth program director at White Rock United Methodist Church and serves on the North Texas Conference Council on Youth Ministries.

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