

*The Ghost in the
Olive Grove*



Glenn Blaine Clark, Jr.

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Olive Grove*

Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

Cry, Wolf

The Great Debate

Metrognomes

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The Ghost in the Olive Grove

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Amy Bolton slumped over in her chair at the kitchen table, as she stared out the window and focused on the blackness of the night. She stared at the olive grove, and she thought back to her childhood. She remembered her grandfather telling her tales of his own childhood beneath the shade of those trees. She remembered how happy and carefree she had been in those days. How small and alive. And it had not been

all that long ago. She wished those days had never ended. She regretted her life now, in every sense of the phrase.

She had married only ten years ago, just shy of one month after her twentieth birthday. At the time, she had seen it as the happiest day of her life. A beautiful wedding in the temple, a fabulous reception, so that her non-Mormon friends and family could be a part of the celebration, and a two-week honeymoon in the Hawaiian islands. And everything *had* been fine, for a while. Unfortunately, her husband had not been one for ruts; and, as far as Josh Bolton had been concerned, Amy was a terrible rut. During the ten years of their marriage, his eyes had slowly begun to wander. He had grown more and more distant. During the last three years of their marriage, he had seldom even touched her to push her out of the way. A year before now, he had taken to sleeping in the guest bedroom, which had been designed for the children that Amy had continually failed to bear him. Six months after that, he had stopped sleeping at home altogether at least three nights out of the week. At the end, just a week ago, he had finally confessed that he was leaving her for a

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three-hundred-pound ex-prostitute named Glowy, and that the two of them were moving to Iceland to start a new life.

Amy spoke to herself as she took another sip from her coffee mug full of brandywine, “Well, if you’re looking for a change, I guess there aren’t any better ways to do it.” Her own humor failed to amuse her. The sound of her voice—the realization that there was no one there to hear her—only caused her bitter grief. She shuddered, as tears began to force themselves from her eyes with relentless persistence. She wanted to die.

She gulped down the last of her wine. “Oh.” She shook her head to clear the pain that had not left her head since he’d left her. “Time for a beer.”

Amy went to the refrigerator and took out a Budweiser. She had filled the refrigerator with nothing but alcohol earlier that day, when she’d arrived at the old house. The family house. Now empty, with the exception of her own miserable soul. Her grandfather had died seven years before, and the family had continued to maintain the old house, but no one had wanted to live in it. Everyone had their own lives to live elsewhere. Happily. Perfectly. Everyone but Amy.

Amy went back to the table and fell gracelessly into the small chair. She grabbed one of the many bottle openers she'd found in the pantry, and she plucked off the defenseless little bottle cap that was keeping her from her beverage. She swallowed a mouthful, without an ounce of joy or satisfaction, and she stared again out the window, at that old, beloved olive grove; that ancient cluster of trees with their sunshine-yellow flowers speckled throughout the mass of their leathery leaves and their tart, little fruits. She remembered her grandfather putting those yellow flowers in her hair. She remembered her own laughter and delight.

The memory served only to remind her again of how miserable she had become. She felt her stomach, and she hated herself still more fervently. The rolls of fat beneath her long, white T-shirt disgusted her. Her entire body disgusted her. She felt ugly, undesirable, loathsome. Why had Josh left her? He must have seen even more horror in her far-from-divine form than even she had managed to find. She had once been blessed with the waist of a Barbie doll and breasts that would have made Ken blush.

Ten years ago.

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The fact was that age and neglect had punished her. She was no longer the perfect-looking girl, who needed no make-up to shine with beauty, that she had once been. She had to concede, however, that her husband hadn't by any means left her for someone of the shape-liness she'd once possessed. Of course, that meant that she'd never been his type in the first place. She wasn't fat *enough*. Not that she was fat by anyone's standards but her own. It was actually sort of hard to tell. Her breasts did a good job of disguising her long-lost model's waist, but nothing could hide those taunting rolls from her own, scathing sight.

She didn't know what she had done wrong. She didn't really believe that she even cared. Josh was in Iceland with *Glowy*, and Amy was here, in this big, old house, with no one. Silent as death.

Death.

She wished for it.

Amy lazily continued to glare out the window. She turned her head to look at the clock on the wall, and, as she did, an image flashed in the corner of her eye. Amy gasped, as her heart began to race, and a frightful chill ran the length of her short spine. It was a man. She

could have sworn it was a man. Before she knew it, her eyes had darted back to the window intently, searching for the trespasser.

No one was there. No one at all. It seemed there was no place he could have gone so quickly that she would not have still been able to see him. She thought her eyes could have been playing tricks on her. The alcohol could have done it too, but Amy had never been one to hallucinate—no matter how inebriated.

Amy began to relax. Her heart began to slow to its natural rhythm. She told herself that it was nothing, or she would have seen it again by now. She then thought to herself that, if it had been nothing, she would not have seen it in the first place. She looked at the phone on the wall, as though it could comfort her. She told herself that she could call someone if she needed to. There was nothing to fear.

She decided that she needed to sleep; alone in this dark, old, creaking house. She rose to leave the table, and she looked again to the olive grove; to the past; to her grandfather telling his tales.

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Again Amy felt her body absorbing that terrible chill, as a more specific memory entered her thoughts: her grandfather's voice.

“There's always been a ghost in this olive grove,” the old man spoke to his twelve-year-old granddaughter. “At least,” he amended, “as long as I've been around. He's a trickster, now. A devil. It's just time you knew. He's an old ghost. I don't know much about that sort of thing, but...” He trailed off, not knowing quite what to say to his very confused-looking granddaughter. “I know your parents have raised you right. I may not agree with their religion, but they've raised you to think pure thoughts and keep civil company. And I know they've told you that there are no ghosts, because I know it's come up in this house. But here's all you need to know about this ghost in particular. He is real, but he can't do any harm to you if you don't want him to. His only power is the power you give him. His only possessions are the objects you give him. So, looking at it that way, he's completely harmless. But you're at that age now. He might try to get to you. He just wants 'in.’”

That's all I really know. Don't know what it means. That's all he wants though, and he'll deceive you like the devil himself to get it. So just watch out. And never come out here alone at night. Not ever.

“All he'll ever try to do is talk at you most likely. But sometimes talk can be as deadly as a dagger.” The old man looked away, as if captured by a haunting remembrance. “Yeah. The way he talks is not quite right. He's a trickster. Just keep that in mind....just in case.” He smiled at her, obviously feeling guilty for the fear he'd brought on.

Standing in the kitchen now, eighteen years later, Amy remembered how frightened she had been that night. It had been so out of character for her grandfather to tell that story, so startling. Her parents had been furious with him for weeks after that, but it all finally blew away with the sands of time, as Amy got older and forgot all about that strange fib about the ghost in the olive grove that her grandfather had told her. The ghost she never did see.

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Amy wondered about that story now. She hadn't thought about it for so long, and she knew better than to believe in ghosts. Still, she found herself as frightened as when she was twelve; frightened by some phantom probably concocted by her combined states of depression, drunkenness, and fatigue. She decided to forget about it and get some sleep.

Amy turned on all the lights she passed on the way to the room she'd chosen on the third floor. She tucked herself in bed snugly, only to find that she could not get the olive grove out of her mind. She grabbed the TV remote and turned the power on. She eventually managed to fall asleep, after a restless night of flipping through channels, to the chipper sounding voices of Regis and Kathie Lee.

Amy awoke that evening with a mild hangover. Ten years ago, she would have relied on endless glasses of water to ease the pain, but now she didn't even consider water a beverage. She went to the refrigerator downstairs and quickly resumed her binge.

She sat at the table and remembered what had kept her up all night. The ghost in the olive grove. *So what?* Amy thought. *What was I so scared of? Even if there is a real ghost, why should I care? What's the worst that it could do?* Amy considered the possibilities, and she went outside, bottle in hand, and headed to the olive grove.

She sat and waited under a tree, and she watched the sunset with a mad determination. A self destructive determination. She *wanted* the ghost to be real. She wanted to see what it was made of. She wanted to be destroyed. She remembered her grandfather's words once more. *'Never come out here alone. Not ever.'* Her courage began to falter with every nighttime sound she failed to identify, every whistle of the wind, every rustling of the leaves, every unfamiliar chirp, every unfamiliar whisper.

Amy...

Amy jumped. It was a whisper! Someone had whispered her name. She stood, quivering unexpectedly, and she looked around stiffly, frightened to put anything in her blind spot. "Who's there? Where are you?"

Sweet...Amy...

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Panic filled her heart, and she hated herself for having come out here. She knew that her grandfather would be shaking his head with disapproval in whatever afterlife he had managed to earn for himself. “Oh, God! Oh, Jesus! This is not real.” She spoke to the disembodied whisperer, “You’re not real. Just the wind and my fear playing tricks on me.”

I am real...believe in me...

Amy’s own terrified voice had fallen to a whisper. “What?”

You must believe enough to see....

“Who...are you?”

I am...

Amy could no longer explain away the conversation she was having. She was frightened and exhilarated all at once. She wanted to go along with this voice, to see where it took her. Yet, at the same time, she did not. *He’s a trickster*, she remembered her grandfather saying. *A devil*. Amy didn’t know what she was getting herself into, but there was something about this situation; something wicked, but...*pleasurably* wicked. There was something sensual about it. There was an eroticism that she failed to understand, but it was there no less—a

dire lust for...*something*. Despite her fear, Amy stayed. “I asked you a question,” she spoke timidly.

Yes...

“Who...”

...are you?...are you? Yes. I am...You do believe.

A faint image began to take form before her. At first it was easily explained away as something unreal, something seen only for having blurred vision. Amy rubbed her eyes, and when she reopened them, the blur had become more well-defined. A man. It was a man, and she could see right through his pale and haunting form. He was a ghost! He was something that was dead and unnatural; something that went against the laws of God. Amy opened her mouth and tried to scream, but she was so stricken with terror that her voice had left her.

The translucent man, dressed like someone from long, long ago, before even her grandfather had been born, reached out with his arm and touched her, as though to comfort her. *Please, sweet Amy...be the one...the one who lets me...in.* Amy felt the pain of another silent scream, along with the icy chill of his ghostly touch, and then there was nothing, aside from silence; sleep.

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Amy woke harshly with the sun the following morning, and it took her a moment to get her bearings. Her first thought upon waking was, *Just a dream. Thank God.* However, it was less than a second before she realized where she was. The olive grove. “Oh, God!” Amy sat up instantly and spun to look behind her. Nothing was there, save the olive trees. No man. No ghost. Amy jumped to her feet and ran clumsily back to the house, looking back over her shoulder with every other breath to be sure that she was still alone.

Amy spent the day pondering the previous night’s encounter. It was the first day, since her husband had left her, that he did not once enter her thoughts. Amy thought of the ghost and her grandfather. What did it mean, “*the one who lets me in?*”

Again she thought on what her grandfather had chosen to say on the matter. “*He just wants ‘in’...don’t know what it means...and he’ll deceive you like the devil himself to get it.*”

Amy was confused. *In.* Amy turned the word over and over in her mind. *What does it mean, and what's so wrong with letting him have it?*

Amy thought about what the consequences could be; what it would be like to enter into an unholy alliance with this *thing* in the olive grove. She began once more to feel unexplainably aroused. Why did it tantalize her so, the thought of submitting to that antique ghost? The thought of letting it *in*. She no longer felt afraid of him. If the ghost were going to hurt her, it would have done so easily after she had fainted. Besides, it seemed clear that the power was in her hands. Whatever it meant for the ghost to get *in*, he was powerless to do it alone; without her. Amy smiled smugly, then she giggled at the insanity of her situation.

That night, Amy grabbed a bottle opener and a beer, and she again headed out to the olive grove. She wasted no time. "Hello? I know you're here! Don't play games with me. My grandfather warned me about you. Come on out." There was no reply. Amy wondered suddenly if she was losing her mind.

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No, came a distant whisper, *your mind is quite all right.*

Amy turned all around, but there was no one. “I’m not afraid of you anymore! I know that you would have hurt me last night, if that was your intention. Let me see you! Who are you?”

I am...yes...thank you for saying so...

Amy began to lose her patience. Why was this specter so elusive? “I don’t have time for this.” Amy decided to work with the fact that she knew the ghost needed her. “I’m going inside to watch TV. I’m not gonna waste my time with someone who won’t identify himself.”

I am...

The ghost resumed his translucent white form directly in front of her, with a hurt look on his face, and his lips did not move as he spoke.

...no one.

Amy felt better. It was a start. “Why didn’t you do anything to hurt me? What do you want? How did you get here?”

Yes, the ghost said, now moving his lips along with the words. *I do...I want...I get...I am...*

Amy began to put it together, and the ghost began to fill with pale coloring. The more she confirmed his reality for him, the more reality he had. “Yes,” she said. “I know. Now please answer the questions.”

Answer...

“Yes.”

Yes. The whisper was gone, replaced by a rich and enchanting young voice. *I am no one. I was once someone, but then I changed that. I changed it...*

Amy was beginning to feel that chill of fear again, but she fought against it, repressing it in favor of her curiosity...and that wicked sensation of wanting to help this nameless spirit; wanting to do whatever he asked of her. “How?” she asked. “How did you...change that?”

Yes. He spoke softly, *With a sturdy rope I did change that from a tree branch tied about my neck.* He lifted his chin, and translucent color filled him with a new sharpness, as he revealed the red marks around his neck. His eyes looked suddenly wild, and Amy was afraid—irrepressibly afraid. *I did jump. I did...break. I did change...I did. I...do. I...am. I am...no one. I will...I will...be...*

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Amy was pale now with the fear of uncertainty. What if he couldn't hurt her last night, simply because she hadn't given him the power to do it? What if she was giving him all the power he needed just by talking to him and watching him materialize slowly with every confirmation that she offered him? Then there was that desire she felt. The more solid he became, the more she understood it. She desired *him*. She desired him in a carnal sense. He was handsome and smooth-looking. His long hair was tied back, light brown, with natural golden highlights. He couldn't have been older than twenty-two.

Twenty-three...I was...I am. 1701...it was the year then...I was changed. I am here still...I am wanting what I have not had....

Amy was mesmerized by the beautiful ghost, his youthful glow evident even in his translucent state. He seemed so much more full now. As they talked, he became harder to see through, more *alive*. "Please, continue," Amy prodded him.

Yes...I will...sweet Amy. I never would hurt you, or any of the others who carry my blood. My wife was with child...I changed things before I knew...I changed me...and I watched. I watched

them all...birth...and...the next. None stay here. I am forgotten. I changed things...I was so...sad. I am sad still. But less so...with you. Sweet Amy, let me in. You will be the one...won't you, love? You are my love. The ghost smiled, and suddenly there was a madness to his rich, brown eyes. *I will give you what you have not had...in turn.*

Amy needed courage. This was a lot to take in, and it was all so cryptic. She quickly popped the cap off of the beer bottle with the dull side of the can opener, and she took a lingering gulp. The desire she felt for this ghost was beginning to frighten her itself.

The tool you have...

Amy had decided to leave. She was too frightened to tempt fate; to see what happened if she could talk him into a perfect, solid man again. “It’s a bottle opener. Or,” she held it up for him to see, “if you use the other side, it punches into cans.”

The ghost reached out and touched Amy’s cheek with his knuckles gently. He was not as cold to the touch. He was warming. It had been so long since Amy had known the warmth of a man. She backed away suddenly, and she tossed the bottle opener to the

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ground at his feet. "Take it. Maybe you can use it to get *in*," she mocked him. "I've gotta get to bed."

Amy ran back to the house, full of fear and confusion. The ghost looked down at the can opener, and then he stared off after her.

As Amy slept that night, she dreamt of the being now trapped in the olive grove. She dreamt not of the ghost, but of the man he had been; a man of passion, with warm flesh and strong arms. Arms that could hold any woman down wherever he wished it. She dreamt of the husband he had been. She saw him in this very house, treating his wife to all of his manly affection...in the very room in which she now slept. But there was something manic in the dream; something that he could not have.

Her dream took her to the olive grove, as it had been then. She saw her ghost, still a man, and he was with another woman. He kissed the woman fiercely, and she seemed to indulge without complaint. He ran his hands all over her body, and she returned the more than friendly action. But then she stopped him. Amy heard

the woman speak with an effort. “Benjamin, this cannot be. I love your brother. He is a good husband, and you’ve a wife of your own.”

“But I do not love her! It is your face I see whenever I am with her! Your name on my lips!”

“No. I came to you to say this. I have chosen to stay with Jonathan. We are going to leave this place soon and get a house of our own.”

“No.” Tears filled his eyes. “Please don’t do this to me. It has pained me ever since he brought you here. I have wanted to be with you, and you have allowed me to think that...” His voice left him.

She, too, seemed on the verge of tears, but stronger than he. “Forgive me, Benjamin. It cannot be.”

Amy’s dream then skipped ahead. She saw Benjamin in a dark room, running his hands over a strong rope. To him, it was all or nothing. He could not live without his brother’s wife. He didn’t.

The dream changed. Amy was in the same room in which she slept, as it had been in 1701. Benjamin came in and pushed her angrily onto the bed. “Sweet Amy,” he said. “Why won’t you let me in?” He forced himself

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onto her, and there was nothing but rage and pain on his face, as it twisted in an effort not to sob.

Amy struggled with him. She tried to push him away, but he was too strong for her. She looked to the side of the bed, and she saw her grandfather. He wasn't really there at all, she knew. He was like an image from another time, another place. She heard him speak again, and she saw that he was standing in the olive grove, talking to her younger self. "...he can't do any harm to you if you don't want him to. His only power is the power that you give him. His only possessions are the objects you give him. So, looking at it that way, he's completely harmless."

The image faded, and she looked the ghost in the eyes, where madness and beauty reined as a pair. "Get off of me! You don't have any power over me! You need me!"

He smiled wickedly, and he slowly lifted his hand, revealing the can opener she had tossed to his feet. "Amy, my one true love! Why did you *mock* me!" Fury flooded his features, and he began to cut into her arm with the sharp end of the metal object. She felt her skin tearing, and then he pulled it out, only to puncture her

with it again. He stabbed her with the can opener no fewer than six times, before, in a fit of wild laughter, he faded from sight, and Amy awoke with a horrified scream.

Amy felt sweat all over her body. The wetness chilled her as much as her fear. She spoke out loud, between hard, panting breaths, “Thank God. Just a dream. Just a dream.” She reached to wipe a particularly irritating trickle of sweat from her left arm. When her hand was once again before her eyes, it was covered not with sweat, but blood; blood that had come from the wounds that the ghost in her dream had inflicted with the can opener. Amy screamed, but soon gained control. She hurried to the bathroom to tend to the six bleeding puncture wounds on her arm. When she had finished cleaning and bandaging herself, Amy spoke through her tears to anyone that could hear. She spoke out of fear. “This has gone too far.”

As night fell over the old country house, Amy simply sat at the small kitchen table and stared out the window, drinking her beer, staring at the olive grove. She

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was too angry at the ghost to further indulge his games. She would let him suffer for a night without her company. As she stared, she saw him materialize as best he could in the olive grove. She smirked. She could still see right through him.

Amy...

Amy was startled. She watched the ghost fade away. “What?”

He materialized again, as best he could, sitting in the chair across from her, at arm’s length from her. *My love...my one, true...*

“Stop right there! No more of this *my one true love* business! My grandfather told me that you were a trickster! You’re lying! He called you a devil! You hurt me in my sleep last night! You don’t love me! You don’t love me at all! How did you get in here anyway? I was under the assumption that you were bound to the olive grove!”

The ghost looked sad. *Bound...yes...but...* He placed the can opener, crusted with dried blood, on top of the kitchen table, then took his hand away from it. *Now we two are bound with a gift. I can follow you. I can go to you. We*

are a pair now. I did not mean to...hurt you. I was angry. You hurt me. You mocked me.

Amy let the ghost's face move her. She saw the pain in his eyes, and she felt guilty for being the cause of it. "I'm sorry." She looked away. "I was scared. I was just...scared." Amy snapped back to attention and looked the ghost directly in his mesmerizing, translucent eyes. "Why should I apologize! You did far worse to me!" She showed him the bandages on her arm. "I was a fool to take things this far. I can't believe this. My husband leaves me for an ex-prostitute, and I'm suddenly back at the old house talking to someone who's been dead for nearly three-hundred years! I am going crazy!"

The ghost himself looked frightened by these words. *No. I am...I am...not...dead! I am changed. I changed me long ago. I...am sorry for every pain I have brought you. You, Amy Bolton, are sane. I am. I am.* The ghost seemed to be losing some of his substance. Amy could see more through him again. He was beginning to fade.

Amy was suddenly frightened by this. She didn't want the ghost to fade. There was something left undone. Something she still had to gain from him. She

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wanted him to stay. She reached out suddenly and grabbed his fading arm. “No! Benjamin! Don’t fade!”

The ghost’s eyes went wide with wonder at her touch; the feel of her warm hand on his arm. He materialized in full for the first time since he’d been courting this partnership with Amy. It was rare that someone had come this close to letting him in. “Amy,” he spoke with a man’s full voice. “Amy, you believe! I am! I am.” He looked at her longingly. “I want to kiss you.”

Amy was hot with desire for this man. She knew in her mind that he was still a ghost. She knew that he was not something she could cling to for years, but she wanted him to kiss her nonetheless. “Yes,” she said.

He stood and went to her. Taking her hand, he led her to stand, and he kissed her gently on the lips. “What is happening to me?” Amy asked herself out loud. “Where are we going with this? What am I getting myself into? I’m a woman, and your a...” She thought the word, but she did not utter it, for fear of spoiling things.

“Ghost,” he said. “I am a ghost.”

Amy looked worried. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to...”

“No,” he consoled her. “I’m all right. You’ve brought me this far, Amy. Please, give me what I want...what I have not had. Let me in...and I will be a ghost no more.”

“In...” Amy was again puzzled by the word.

“Let me give you what you have not had, Amy. Let me in.”

Amy considered his words. *What I have not had.* She thought of her husband, how he had neglected her. The love of a man was something she had not had in a very long time. It was something she wanted very much. “What do you want from me?”

The ghost massaged her arm with his strong hands. “This, my love. The warmth of your flesh, the taste, the...passion...”

Yes, Amy thought. *He really does want to love me! He wants me, just as I want him.* She remembered that he had said he would be a ghost no more, if she let him in. It had been so long since any man had wanted her. It had been so long since any man had loved her. She realized with exhilaration that he was going to stay. If he were a ghost no more, then he would be a man again. Flesh and blood.

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“Yes,” he said. “Flesh and blood. My own flesh and my own blood. Amy, please.”

She looked longingly into his deep brown eyes. “Give me what I have not had, Benjamin. Give it to me now.” She embraced him with mounting passion and kissed his dead mouth deeply. It seemed not dead at all, but as alive as she was; alive with yearning for her. All for her.

Without leaving the room, the pair gave in to their passion. Amy allowed him to master her, never forgetting that by tomorrow he would be alive again. Flesh and blood. He would be more real to her than he already was. The more that Amy surrendered to her ghostly lover, the more she felt as if she were rising out of herself. Floating. It was like nothing she’d ever experienced before.

Benjamin slept for a long time. He did not wake until evening. It took time for him to adjust to the need for waking up. He opened his new eyes with wonder, even amazement, at the long forgotten crust he found there and flicked away. He was cold on the kitchen floor,

another brilliant sensation. It had worked. He was alive again. He was a creature of flesh and blood. He looked to the window and stared at the trees that had been his prison for centuries. He was then stricken with astonishment at the sight of his own reflection, barely visible in the window; or, rather, *her* reflection. The change of gender was also going to take some getting used to, but Benjamin had always been open to new things.

He turned to dress, but, as he did, something caught his eye. He turned back, with his newly purloined eyes, and he smiled as he looked out the window. It was the girl. He was right. She stood there among the trees, looking lost and afraid, barely visible at all—just a ghost in the olive grove.

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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