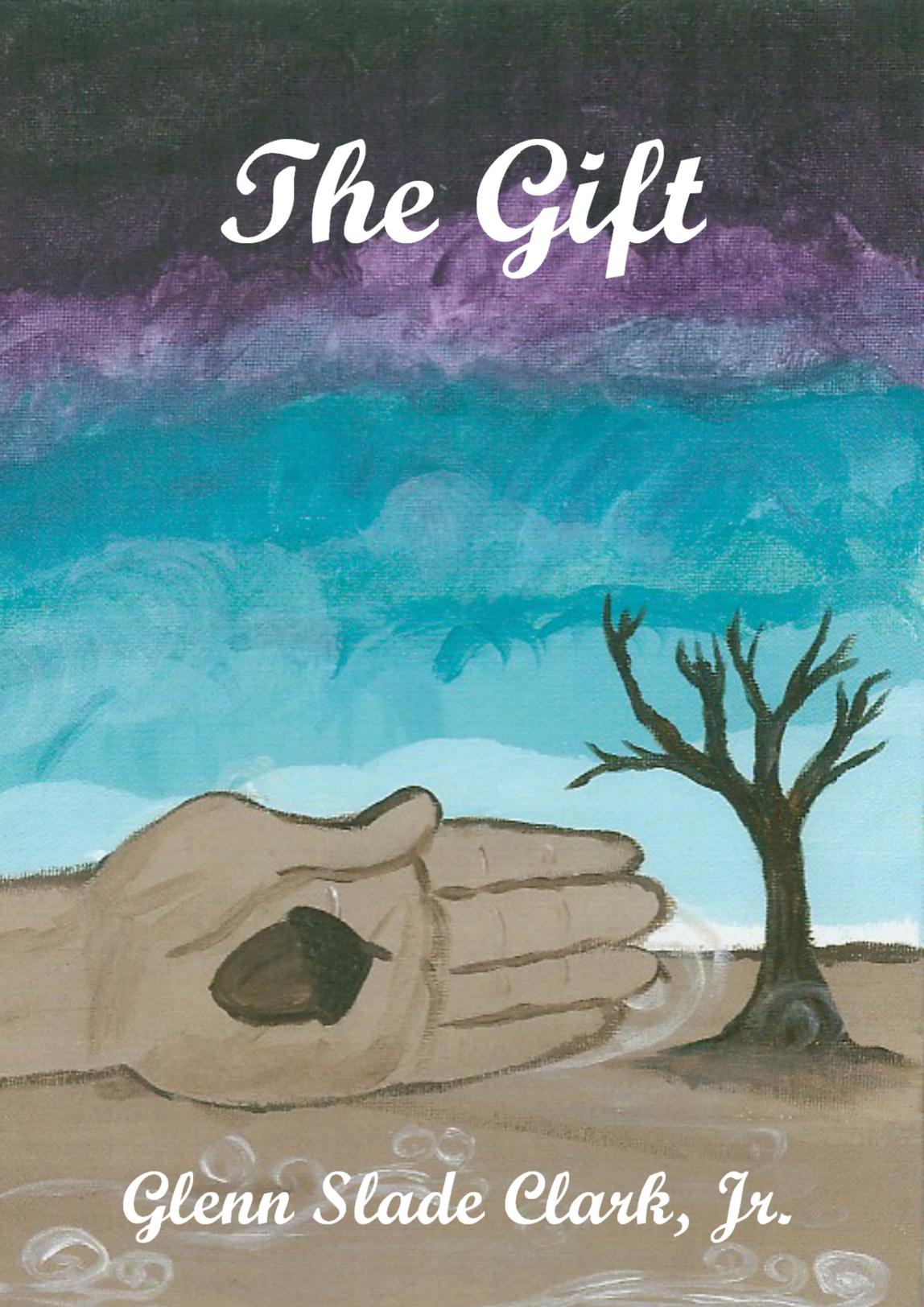


The Gift

A painting with a textured, canvas-like appearance. The top half features a sky with horizontal bands of purple, teal, and light blue. In the foreground, a large, light-brown hand is shown from the side, holding a dark, rounded object. To the right of the hand is a dark, leafless tree with a thick trunk. The ground is a flat, light-brown surface with some faint white swirls at the bottom.

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

The Gift

Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf

The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas:

The Vampire Murders

The Haunting of Alexas Mansion

The Great Debate

Metrognomes:

The Demons of the Blood

The Shaman's Apprentice

The Legends of Nod:

The Dragons of Nod

All for the Blood of Nightstorm

Enter: The Wanderer

The Mech Valley Debacle

A Hero Before His Time

The Gift

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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The Gift

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Cover art by Valerie N. Clark

There was a great and terrible war. When and where it happened, none can really say. All that is known is that it left only two human survivors: a man and a woman, though neither of them knew about the other. And almost all of the land was left in waste.

As the man found himself alone and terrified, an angel came down to earth and spoke with him. The angel asked him, “What do you think you need?”

The man answered, “It’s too hot. I’m lonely. I miss music.”

The angel tilted its head, apparently listening to something that the man could not hear. After a moment, the angel perked up and gave its attention back to the man. It held out its hand, offering a gift. “God says this is what you need.”

The man took the item from the angel’s hand. It was an acorn. “Is God *joking*?”

The angel only smiled, as it turned and walked away.

The man pondered the acorn. “This is absurd! God lets a war devastate my world! I am all that’s left! Then to comfort me He sends an acorn! It is a *sick* joke! All of Creation has just been one sick joke!” He threw the acorn as far as he could, enraged at God for offering such a heartless insult. The man began to wander. He wandered for thirty years.

After decades of lonesome wandering through the desolate earth, the man spotted a miraculous thing. It was a great oak tree. Not only that, but, beneath its long sought-after shade was a *woman*. Another person! She seemed so content, as she frolicked with little squirrels and listened to the birdsong from the high branches of the tree. The sight, the sounds, and the *life* before him brought tears to the man’s eyes that stung as he wiped them away and approached the woman. She seemed just as surprised to see him, as he asked her in a shaking voice, “How did you ever find such a place?”

After taking in the sight of the man, accepting the reality of him, the woman answered happily, “I didn’t find it. Thirty years

THE GIFT

ago, after the war, an angel came by and asked me what I thought I needed. I told her that it was too hot, that I was lonely, and that I missed the sound and feel of music. The angel gave me an acorn and said, ‘God says this is what you need.’

“I laughed at first and asked, ‘Is this some sort of sick joke?’ The angel simply smiled and walked away. I thought about it for a while, pondering the acorn, because that’s all there was to do. Eventually, I planted it. Over time, it grew into a giant tree, shading me from the heat of the sun. It attracted squirrels, who warmed up to me and kept me company. It attracted birds, who woke me up every day with wonderful music. I was happy...for a while.”

“What happened then?” the man asked. “Why didn’t you stay happy?”

The woman answered, “After thirty years, the angel came back and asked me again what I thought I needed. I told her I missed having someone to talk to who could actually have a conversation with me: someone who could talk back. I told her I thought I needed a parrot. She told me, ‘God will send you what you need in two days.’

“Now two days have passed, and here you are.” She puzzled over him. “And you’re not a parrot at all.”

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of eleven books, including the novel *Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf*, the short fiction anthology *The Great Debate*, the Gothic horror series *The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas*, and two fantasy series: *Metrognomes* and *The Legends of Nod*. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is currently hard at work on his next book.

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