


Fiction

The Dream

by CHRIS FABRY



Hannah Wilson's dream rose again at Higby's Supermarket. She needed five things and knew exactly where four of them were and how long it would take to navigate the gauntlet. Other big-name grocers placed bread on one side, milk on the other, and separated vegetables and meat by a long gulf of end-caps and impulse buys. Not Higby's. The small-town feel and the customer-comes-first attitude was why she shopped there. She thought it smart to begin with the one item she had never bought, so she trailed an employee through bakery, tracking her like an elusive rhino on the Serengeti. And it was just before she spoke that Hannah saw the object that made her stop and stare. One look stirred something inside.

AN OLD TYPEWRITER. The kind she associated with Hemingway. In her mind, she saw his fingers poised above the keys and his riveted stare at the page. She also saw her father's face. He had brought a machine like this from his office the week before she started college, carrying it like a farmer might carry an orphaned calf.

"They were going to throw it out," he said. "There's just one key that won't work. How hard can it be to fix the s? You'll need one of these for school, won't you?"

Those were the days before computers took over the world. She smiled at the dusty memory. It was an example of his kindness, a way he had thought of her amidst his aloof, phantomlike fathering.

The typewriter sat on a ledge at the back of Higby's café where shoppers chatted over chai and employees ate lunch or took a break from checking, slicing, and stocking. A muted television broadcast a news channel with up-to-the-minute reports of the day's events. But it was the typewriter that held Hannah's gaze.

She edged closer and noticed a handwritten inscription on an index card taped to the wall above it that read: *Say whatever you want and remember to hit RETURN. No profanity.*

An employee walked by, and Hannah turned. "Excuse me, is this for anybody or just employees?"

The girl was at most 18, though she could have been 15. She wore an apron with the Higby's



emblem stitched on the front, and her nametag read *Melanie*. She rubbed her hands, eyes darting toward the checkout lanes, then back at Hannah.

"I'm not sure, ma'am."

"It's OK," Hannah said, waving a hand. "It's not important."

Hannah hurried through the bakery and a thick aroma of pastries that made her mouth water. Could breathing make you gain weight? After a few minutes, she realized the gluten-free bread was refrigerated. Her unaided search had eaten up precious time, but she had found it on her own, and it was on sale. She put the loaf in her basket.

Had anyone typed on the page in that typewriter? She hadn't gotten close enough to see. What would a person type? What words would someone leave behind anonymously in a grocery café?

She shook her head. The whole thing was silly. She needed to get her items and leave. Traffic was terrible this time of day. She needed to get dinner in the oven before ...

She glanced across the aisles and saw the typewriter on the ledge. Was it nostalgia that drew her? Memories of her father? Perhaps it was her high school typing teacher. Cat-eye glasses, prim, bright red lipstick.

asdf jkl;

Hannah had forgotten most everything she had learned in high school, but she used her typing skills every day of her life.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

All the letters of the alphabet were in that sentence. With daily practice, she had increased her typing speed to more than 60 words per minute. Once she had hit 85. And she was accurate.

Then she remembered the feeling of placing her fingers over the keys. Anything could happen. Words brought an endless string of possibilities. The most exciting and terrifying thing in the world was a blank page.

She shook off the memory and hurried to the meat aisle. She chose organic chicken breasts for her casserole. She had volunteered a meal for a family in her church. The mother's surgery hadn't healed. Her children had allergies to certain foods, so she had to be careful.

For some reason, she couldn't get the typewriter out of her mind. And the truth was, she knew exactly why it haunted her. And it wasn't nostalgia.

Hannah's dream, for as long as she could remember, was to write. She'd studied journalism in college and worked for the better part of a year at a small Midwestern newspaper. That was the year she met Bruce, and falling in love with an Air Force pilot meant closing the door on her dream.

Children came and travel and more responsibilities. The dream, like her old typewriter, got pushed farther back in life's closet. Seeing it on the ledge brought a pang of regret.

Or was it something else? Hope, perhaps?

She found the other items on her list and, like an arrow, shot toward the checkout lanes, found an open aisle in the 20-items-or-less lane, swiped her card, and headed for the parking lot. She almost made it outside before she saw the café in her peripheral vision. She had to know what was on that page.

She put her bags on a table and lifted the page rolled into the carriage.

I hate my job. I hate my job. I hate my job.

The next two sentences had X's through them.

Melanie, will you go out with me?

Hannah wondered what management would say about on-the-job dating. She kept reading.

If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you, you don't work in the meat department.

She laughed out loud, though she wasn't sure Rudyard Kipling would.

Seeing the words gave her a sense of relief and resolution. She could go about her day without the intrigue. As she reached for her bags, she noticed a line of words blocked by ... what was it called? The paper bail? She lifted it.

Sometimes dreams must die in order for them to be reborn in us.

She stared at the smudgy letters. The ribbon needed changing, but no matter how light they were, the words burned her heart. She couldn't breathe. It felt like someone had written a message in the sky, and she was the only one who had looked up before the letters disappeared in the wind.

She rolled the paper up in the carriage and read the sentence again. Who had written those words? And what had possessed an employee or customer to type that message?

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She thought of the verse, "Unless a grain of wheat falls ..."¹ And, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"²

Hannah didn't believe in coincidences or that God hid messages in bowls of alphabet soup. His will was plain and ordered, and you shouldn't look for cryptic messages at a grocery café.

Still, there was something about these words on this day that made her believe something bigger was happening.

She glanced around and then pulled out the page, folded it neatly, and put it in her purse. She

inserted another page and rolled it until it was at the right position and turned to leave.

Again, she stopped.

Her fingers hovered over the home keys. She retyped the words she had read verbatim, listening to the clacking, feeling the weight of the keys under her fingers and the surprising force it took to strike words onto the page.

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She hit the RETURN bar twice.

Thank you for sharing those words from your heart. You'll never know what they meant to me today. God knows your dreams and the desires of your heart.

She stepped back and studied the words. And it was that day, in that hour, that a stone was rolled away and Hannah's dream awoke and moved toward the light. ☺

¹John 12:24

²John 3:7 (ESV)

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CHRIS FABRY is an award-winning author of more than 80 books. His novelization of the Kendrick Brothers film, *Overcomer*, releases this month. He encourages and inspires those with a writing dream at heyyoucanwrite.com. He is also host of Chris Fabry Live on Moody Radio.



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