

Julia's Quest

Kim Ballard

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Prologue

Oxeye, North Carolina

Jake ran downhill through the trees in the cove between two mountains, scrambling to keep his balance under the weight he carried. “Mama! Mama! Come quick! Sarah’s burnt!” Jake hollered. He knew his voice would echo loud and far. Though he was still too far away to see even the outline of his house down by the creek, he knew his mother would hear him. Not yet a man but no longer a child, he carried Sarah over his shoulder, wrapped hastily in his outer shirt to put out the fire.

“Mama! Come quick! I’m near ’bout to the house!”

“I hear y’un! Son, I heard ye and I’m acomin’ rat now.” Miss Julia’s voice was distant, from up near the garden, but Jake knew she could move as swift as a doe.

Jake got to the back of the house only seconds before his mother did. Jake, in his undershirt, gently laid Sarah down on the table where Miss Julia normally sorted the laundry. Sarah was not exactly unconscious, not exactly conscious. Jake had barely laid Sarah down before Julia was removing the outer wrapping of Jake’s shirt and then Sarah’s own clothing. Her eyes swept over the burns that covered the child’s face, shoulder, arm, leg, and torso on her left side. Sarah heaved in painful groans.

Sophie, the youngest of the three, came running up, having followed Jake all the way from the fire. She was sobbing and panting, so Jake picked her up to comfort and quiet her while Miss Julia gently began to heal Sarah.

“Now Sarah, child, you listen to Miss Julia. Quiet down, honey, we gonna blow away this here burn. I got to remove some more of this cloth and hit’s gonna hurt mighty powerful, but you just look at me here in my

eyes. Look at me right on, and we's gonna be jus' fine. You'll see."

Sarah cried out as cloth pulled flesh from her body in places.

"Look at me, Sarah!" Miss Julia called her attention back, and Sarah obeyed and tried to keep her eyes on Miss Julia.

Sophie buried her face into Jake's shoulder and he gently shushed her as if she were a fretting baby, but he never took his eyes off Sarah's face. By consoling Sophie, he meant to vicariously console Sarah.

Miss Julia spread out her hands and held them palms down above the little girl's body. She lifted her face to heaven and recited three times in whispers such that no one heard the words, but with only the breath and whistles of speaking rapidly. "Thair came an angel from the East bringing frost and fire. In frost, out fire. In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Goost." As she prayed she slowly moved her hands away from the body toward the river eastward and paused briefly.

Then she held her hands again just above the body, palms down, and prayed unintelligibly a second time, "Thair came an angel from the East bringing frost and fire. In frost, out fire. In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Goost." Again she pulled the burning and disfiguration from the young body into her own palms and then sent it all away toward the river, and called for healing from the Trinity.

Then one last time she prayed with her whole being, "Thair came an angel from the East bringing frost and fire. In frost, out fire. In the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Goost." With arms still raised toward the creek she prayed silently to Jesus to spare one so small and so precious.

Sarah's breathing calmed and her eyes closed into a deep sleep. Her damaged flesh seemed also to rest without blistering. Jake was rocking side to side with Sophie, who was now watching Sarah and had stopped crying. The silence gave way to the gurgle of the creek running from the mountain down further through the valley, a sound that was ordinarily taken for granted but in a moment like this was a soothing rhythm—a promise for healing and the continuing of life. Breeze through the trees and the distinctive calls of several birds in conversation further helped to fill the passing moments with a sense of life and restoration.

Finally Miss Julia turned back to her son and said very quietly, "She'll sleep now for a bit. I'll stay with her. Can you tell me what happened?"

Jake scratched his head. "I don't rightly know. Travis and Billy was

th'owing a ball when the teacher won't looking and it se't the kerosene lamp off the table. Most ever'body'd lef' by then, 'cepten' Sarah and some other girls." Jake shrugged. "I reckon Sarah's skirt got some of that kerosene on it and then the fire ketched it. She come runnin' out the schoolhouse screamin' and that fire plum ate up her dress. I jus' put my clothes on her and caught her up over my shoulder and run home. Fas' I could."

Julia listened with her face all scrunched up in attention and visualization. It was nearly three miles from the schoolhouse to their house. "Angels must'a carried you here, son. That's quite a distance to run with an injured child in your arms."

"Yes, ma'am," was all Jake could say in reply. He hadn't stopped to think about the distance, only that he knew his mother was the only one who could heal burns, and he had simply brought Sarah home. He put Sophie down on the ground, and she instinctively went to Miss Julia, who picked her up, patted her arm, gently pressed her cheek with kisses and reassuring whispers. Jake stretched his arms, expecting them to be sore after the ordeal, but they weren't.

Julia smiled, knowing his thoughts. "The Lord gives powerful remedy to those he can trust to be about his business. You bringing Sarah here so directly has been honored by the Savior."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, but he was watching Sarah sleep. There was something about the peacefulness he saw there; there was something in the rhythm of her breathing. He felt a deep down stirring, without thinking it, that he wanted always to protect Sarah. He had bonded with her.

He was too young to understand how little power he actually had to protect the one he would grow to love.

One

Chicago, Illinois
Nearly Fifty Years Later

Dark mist swelled and swirled. Flashes of lightning revealed in visual stutters the sight of someone running. A child. Feelings of desperation seemed to permeate the darkness. “Julia! Julia!” She heard her name called out by a young female voice, obviously in pain, but she could see no one. And she did not know the voice. She searched the misty darkness in between the flashing light. She began to run, then fell off a cliff, flying underwater. She breathed slowly, deeply. Gliding through the water, she came across a box. She opened the box.



Julia sat up suddenly and pressed her warm palms against her face. The bed covers that had been pulled up to her chin were now fallen into her lap. Her pale blue nightshirt was too thin to protect her from the early morning chill.

Steven turned on the lamp by his side of the bed, then squinted out the forty watts of light. “What’s wrong, Julia?” he whispered.

She was still sitting straight up, hands over her eyes, concentrating on breathing deeply to regain calm. “Nothing.”

Steven reached for the clock and tilted it to see the time. “Geez, it’s 2:47 in the morning.”

“I’m sorry I woke you,” Julia said without conviction, without movement, in a steady, low voice.

“You wanna talk about it?”

“No. Just. Can’t sleep.”

Steven rolled his eyes. “You sat up awful quick.”

Julia said nothing.

Steven nodded. “Okay. I’m going back to sleep.” He switched off the light and readjusted himself down into the bed with a deep breath. Ordinarily he was the kind of man to give up the shirt off his back, go the extra mile, and maybe turn the other cheek. But he did not favor being awakened in the middle of the night. Especially when he was not allowed to help solve the problem.

Julia lay back down and pulled the covers up to her chin. In a few hours she would be headed home. Home to view the body of the man who had raised her.



Julia signed the register, *Ms. Julia A. Jameson; Chicago*. She walked slowly down the center aisle of the funeral home chapel and tried not to breathe in the dank, multi-lacquered wood smell emanating from the pews that surrounded her. It felt too much like being in church. She had stopped going to church when she was in high school. The carpet she walked across was powder blue and frayed at the edges. Ridged pillars with heavy white paint were strategically placed among the pews. Small stained-glass windows were dark with age, and the ceiling had faux molding with whelps of water damage here and there. The casket in front of the pulpit seemed to grow as she approached.

She stood by the casket staring into the waxen face that was her father. The father who had adopted her. The only one she had ever known. This still, fixed face was not the face she remembered. Its expression did not show signs of frustration or temper. He wasn’t a bad man, really. Most people outside the family seemed to like him. But he was egotistical, smoked too much, drank too much, and had a chip on his shoulder the size of Lake Michigan. Worse than anything else about him were the mixed messages. Julia seemed favored but was generally ignored. She could have whatever she wanted. She was a normal American girl; she

took advantage of the privilege when she could. But she never quite felt like she had a father. He was always there, but never approachable. He gave her money when she wanted it, but was hostile to any affection or personal request she made. At best he was quiet and reclusive. At worst he was loud and violent. Julia had developed a strong, thick skin—trusting no one, because she was always aware that affections could change at a moment's notice. She was respected among her colleagues...but had no real friends to speak of, other than Steven.

Julia looked at the body now cold and harmless in this metal box. For the first time she noticed how pitiful he looked. The hairline was receded, and the thick eyebrows were peppered curly white. She had not seen him since he'd greyed. She tried to count how many years it had been since she'd last seen him. Being so disconnected from her family sometimes made her feel just a little lost in the world. She had created her identity, a rather solid reputation as a strong-minded, successful lawyer, but standing here at the casket of the man who had been her father resurrected old, forgotten feelings of awkwardness and uncertainty.

The flick of a cigarette lighter caused Julia to glance over her shoulder. A woman—short-skirted, high-heeled, straw-blond hair cut around her face in stylish spikes—stood several feet away. She took a long drag from the narrow cigarette as it lit and then released a heavy cloud that thinned as it rose in the airlessness. The woman glanced nervously around the chapel, seemingly ignoring Julia, then said, "Sure is stuffy in here."

"Hello, Tess," Julia offered.

Tess examined Julia, who was on the shapely side of thin and professionally dressed in a deep purple skirt and jacket, low pumps. Her auburn hair fell shoulder length. Naturally wavy, it curled under around her chin. She was attractive, though not beautiful. Tess took another drag and said through the smoke, "Julia. Surprise, surprise. Never expected to see you here."

Julia nodded.

"Where's Steven?" Tess asked, drawing out his name with resentment.

"He had to work."

"You mean you asked him not to come. Still ashamed of us, aren't you?"

Julia turned back to the casket.

“That’s right, we’re here to look at the dead man,” Tess said without moving.

“Where’s Mother?” Julia asked.

“Italy. No, the South of France. Wait, I mean Holland. Or was it Africa? Where do you *think* she is?”

“Why isn’t she here?”

Tess checked the ash tip of her cigarette. “She fell and broke her hip a couple of weeks ago, and the doctor said she can’t get out of bed yet.”

“How did she fall?”

“She had just a *little* too much to drink. The phone rang and she tried to run downstairs to answer it. There’s still only one phone in the house, you know.”

“Too much to drink?”

“Scotch. She started drinking soon after you told them to stay out of your life. What was that—ten, fifteen years ago? Anyway, I thought Scotch was a pretty good replacement for you.”

“Why didn’t you call me?”

“When she started drinking?”

“When she fell.”

“I didn’t think you cared to know the family business,” Tess replied, preoccupied with looking for a place to drop her ashes. She eyed the potted palm by the organ.

Julia drew her hands to her hips, one leg slightly turned out from her body. “You know better, Tess. I care about what happens to Mom and Dad. And you.”

“Yeah, right.” Tess sneered and tapped her ashes at the base of the palm. “That’s why you disappeared.”

“I didn’t disappear. There were some things I had to take care of, and Mom and Dad were trying to stop me. I thought it best to cut ties for a little while. Time has a way of passing.”

“Did you find them? Your birth parents?”

Julia and Tess stared at one another for a moment.

“No,” Julia answered quietly and looked away.

Tess took one last draw from her cigarette, put it out on the side of the pot, then twisted the butt into the dirt. “Big-time lawyer like you. Can’t even find a couple of people. What does that do for your reputation?”

“Tess, why do you hate me so much? What did I ever do to you?”

As if she were expecting the question or had already answered it a thousand times, Tess answered directly, “You stole my birthright. If it weren’t for you, *I’d* be the oldest. They wouldn’t have had anyone to compare me to. I’m not so bad, you know.” She took out another cigarette and lit it. “*I* would be ‘Daddy’s darling,’ not you. There wouldn’t *be* a you. There should *never* have been a you.” She flicked the lighter lid shut and dropped it in her purse.

Julia wondered why she’d asked the question. Everything wrong in Tess’s life always traced back to Julia’s having been adopted. As often happens to a couple who “can’t” have children, Alice and Nick adopted Julia as a newborn and a year later Alice became pregnant with Tess.

“I’m sorry I made your life so miserable.”

“You don’t know the half of it. What’ve you got that I don’t, huh? Tell me.”

Julia tilted her head and folded her arms but didn’t answer.

Tess continued, “I thought *I* was adopted. I was so upset. And stupid.” She spit out that last word, then straightened her body for a moment and looked around the room like she was watching a fly. Suddenly she began to laugh with conjured force, her body contorting like one of those toy figurines with all the limbs, head and torso tightly strung, released by a push up under the bottom of its little pedestal. Push the bottom of the pedestal in and the figurine goes limp. Release the push and the figurine tightens up straight again. Sometimes the figurine gets caught in a pose and the limbs are frozen in jags and juts. Tess’s knees buckled, feet pointing at each other, her cigarette-holding hand was thrust wide as she bent forward forcing a laugh that sounded more like a cough. She straightened up slightly, drawing in air so forcefully that dissonant tones strained from her smoky vocal chords. “I was so stupid. Then Aunt Pen told me the truth.”

“Aunt Pen?” Julia tried to picture their mother’s sister.

“She knew you were adopted.” Tess jabbed the air toward Julia with her cigarette-fingers punctuating her words like a drumbeat. “And she knew you weren’t ever supposed to know. *And* she knew it would put you in your place if you knew. So I told you.”

“Put me in my place?”

“Yeah. You thinking you’re better than me. Well you’re not. Finding

out you were nothing made my day.” She tapped her chest hard. “I’m the daughter of Nick Jameson, not you. Never you. You have no idea what it is to be the daughter of Nick Jameson. Everything was so easy for you.” She stood with her weight on one leg, the other tipped out, one arm across her middle, the other bent at the elbow holding her cigarette near her shoulder.

Julia nodded as people do who need time to think of what to say next.

Tess cut her eyes at Julia as she enjoyed another long drag. She tapped the ashes into the potted plant a step away from her and then perched her elbow back on her hand that held her waist.

Julia took a deep breath. This was familiar territory. She took the bait anyway, compelled to reply but with less passion than her sister, “You can’t really believe that everything was easy for me, Tess. I lived in the same house you did. Same parents, biological or not.” Julia lowered her voice, her patience thinning. Her thoughts came out in spurts. “I tried my best to look out for you. You think that was easy? Knowing I was different? Treated differently? And you were always asking for trouble. Coming home drunk all the time. Out with that idiot. That night you came home, the night you blurted all this out, I was really worried about you. And so angry! You were asking Dad to beat you up. You knew he would but you came in like...like a bull in a china shop. All the time.”

“And there you were, always there to help me. To fix it. Well, I didn’t need you to fix it. Don’t you get it? I didn’t want you. Nobody wanted you.”

Julia put her hands up as if bright lights were shining in her eyes. “Alright, I got it. I got it.”

Julia realized this was a useless conversation that would end in the same place it had begun—nowhere. She pitied Tess only up to a point. She knew she was not responsible for Tess’s disappointments. At times like this, though, Julia struggled to remember they were each victims of their parents’ choices, just as anyone is to a certain degree. Yet it was disappointing to see Tess still refusing to take responsibility for herself—for her own choices to be happy or miserable. Tess had always blamed Julia for whatever she could. It had become so convenient, so handy. At this point none of Tess’s words could make her feel guilty, only sad.

“Whatever problems you had with Dad, Tess, had nothing to do with me. In fact I’m surprised you’re even here. Not that you’ve even looked at him since you walked in.”

“I was there when he died. It’s not like I need reminding what he looks like. Besides, somebody has to take care of family business. See that everything’s done right.” Tess sauntered over to the casket and looked in as if she were looking over a porch railing down at a busy street. “How did you know he was dead?”

“Nancy called me. She said one minute he was seating people and the next minute he was dead.”

“The restaurant is mine now, so don’t get any ideas.”

“I don’t want the restaurant.”

“I should have known it would be beneath an important lawyer like you to own a restaurant.”

Julia shook her head. “You really are a piece of work, Tess.” She took one last glance at the body in the casket and walked back toward the door through which she had come.

“Julia,” Tess called after her.

Julia stopped and turned.

“Mom wants to see you. Tonight. Before you go back to the city. I assume you’re going back tonight?”

“Yes.”

“Then you aren’t coming to the burial in the morning?”

“No.”

“Good.” Tess turned back to the casket.

Julia walked out, closing the door behind her. She walked down the hall and through the heavy metal door to the outside. The crisp, suburban air, wafting day-old burned leaves, stung her throat. As she got into the taxi, she realized she left her purse just inside the chapel under the register. She apologized to the driver for holding him up yet another minute and he agreed to wait as she ran back inside.

She opened the door noiselessly. She heard sobbing. Tess had pulled up a chair facing the casket and was sitting hunched with her face in her hands weeping.

The sound of her crying reminded Julia of when they were kids. Tess and her father seemed always to clash, but it was rare that he could make

her cry, at least as far as anyone knew. As she grew up, she hardened to his hurtful comments. Becoming more brittle rather than strong. One particular time came to Julia's mind. Tess must have been about twelve years old, Julia almost fourteen. Even as a young child everything Tess did or said had a flash of defiance, but it was in self defense, really. Julia admired her high-spirited little sister. Julia was probably more willful, though not as brash and outspoken. Their father constantly compared the two, Tess usually in the negative.

On this particular day Tess dressed up for a party because her friend June was turning thirteen and her parents allowed her to invite three friends over. They would go out to eat first and then spend the night. Tess was one of the elite three. When the invitation came, she had tearfully begged for a new dress, but her mother had stood firm insisting that Julia's dress, worn only three or four times, was better than she could ever hope to find new. It took her a few days, but by the time the party day arrived, Tess had come around to accept the hand-me-down as her own.

Just before her ride came to pick her up the day of the party, Tess appeared at the top of the steps and paused, breathing heavily. Carrying her mom's small, pale-blue Samsonite overnight case, she came slowly down the steps, looking rather lost and thin in the dress that had once been Julia's. The dress made it obvious that Julia had begun to physically mature a little younger than Tess. It was a cotton pull-over, the color of sunset, that looked fabulous on Julia's darker skin, dark hair and dark eyes, but on Tess it made her strawberry-blond curls look too orange, even with most of her hair pulled back from her face. She was definitely at an awkward stage, desperately self-conscious. Her mother had given her permission to wear make-up for the first time to this party and she had put on a little too much rouge, a little too much lipstick and far too much green eye shadow. But, she had emphasized to her mother, all the girls wore it like that. Her mother hesitated but conceded, and left her to finish getting dressed while she went down to start dinner for the rest of the family.

Tess came through the front entry and stepped into the den where her father was reading the paper and smoking. She stood, holding the case in front of her with both hands on its handle, her knees and calves showing beneath the case through the "nude" pantyhose, and stared at her father.

"Tess, you look so pretty," Julia said, having come in from feeding the

dogs out back.

Their mother came from the kitchen, wiping her hands on the red-and-white checkered hand towel. "You sure do, hon," she chimed in.

Their father turned the page of the newspaper and continued to read as if he were alone.

"Nick, doesn't your daughter look nice tonight?" their mother cajoled.

Tess sucked in her lips as she, her mother, and Julia looked expectantly at the back of the newspaper above cross-legged jeans and cowboy boots, smoke floating from the left hand that held one side of the paper.

"Nicolas," Mom sang, trying to guard her voice from the growing anxiety and frustration of putting herself in the middle.

He tucked down a corner of the paper and looked at her. "What?"

"Look at your lovely daughter, all dressed up for June's birthday party."

He glanced toward Tess, put the cigarette in his mouth, and shook the paper back to reading position. "So?" he mumbled.

Julia looked at Tess, who had sucked her cheeks in, elongating her face, trying not to cry the tears that formed.

"Tess, that dress looks a whole lot better on you than it did on me," Julia lied.

"It sure makes you look all grown up," Mom added.

"You'll go to hell lying like that, Julia," Dad said absentmindedly. "And what *is* that smell?" He took the cigarette from his mouth as he squashed down the newspaper. He nosed the air like one of his dogs and set his eyes on Tess, looking at her for the first time. "Is that you? Look at you! You look like a hussy and smell even worse."

"Nick!" Mom snapped and lunged toward him but with no intention to do anything.

"I mean it, Alice," he snapped back. "She smells all sickly sweet, like some old lady."

Tess dropped the case with a loud thud but not loud enough to convict her father of his insensitive outburst. She ran out the front door, leaving it wide open.

"Tess!" Julia called after her as she followed, closing the door behind her.

By the time Julia found her in a swing at the kiddie park, Tess was sobbing. Her dress had gotten caught on a bush and was torn at the hem. Julia sat in the swing next to her, not knowing what to say to the broken-hearted child. Tess finally looked up at Julia and blurted out, “Why does he hate me, Julia?” Her green eyes pleaded for an answer. Julia shrugged. She wanted desperately to comfort her, but didn’t know how.

Tess welcomed Julia’s presence less and less during the difficult years of growing up and increasingly resented Julia’s awkward attempts to comfort and protect her from herself and their father. She made it clear she saw Julia as self-centered and opportunistic. No matter what Julia did, Tess resented her.

Tess’s sobs didn’t seem much different as an adult. Julia could almost hear her ask the same question as when she was twelve years old—*Why does he hate me?*—and again, Julia did not know how to comfort her.

Julia picked up her purse and closed the chapel door quietly as she left.



As the taxi pulled up to the house, Julia leaned toward the window and seemed to freeze somewhere in between the present and the past, forgetting for a moment why she would return to the two-story, L-shaped house. The sight of the blue-grey aluminum siding sent chills through her. Panic flooded through her veins, but she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *To honor Mother*, she answered, reminding herself. She paid the driver to wait there for her and walked up to the front door of the house.

She checked her change purse for a house key and laughed at the absurd, mindless reflex. But it was still there, in the lesser used middle section with paperclips and an outdated postage stamp. She let herself in quietly and crept upstairs. The door to her mother’s room was open an inch and Julia strained to see if she was asleep. She pushed the door gently and it moaned. Julia grimaced.

“Julia?” her mother asked sleepily, twisting to face the door.

“Yes, Mom, it’s me. I’m sorry I woke you.”

“Come in,” she whispered, patting a place beside her on the bed. The

room smelled like it had been closed up for several days. Floral blue curtains hung dark and heavy at the windows, a pile of dirty clothes could be seen just inside the open door to the closet. Magazines formed a half moon on the empty side of the bed. Alice was pale even for her fair skin. She had lost weight recently, making her look gaunt, older.

Awkwardly, Julia leaned down to kiss her mother's cheek. Alice's shoulders felt thin and fragile in Julia's light grasp. She sat on the bed where her mother had indicated. "How did you know it was me?"

"No need to whisper, I'm awake now." Mom smiled. She tried to push herself up.

"How did you know it was me, Mom?" Julia grabbed the pillow and puffed it up behind the woman, making no effort to even feign the slightest gesture of familial connection other than this courtesy anyone might extend to a stranger struggling with a difficult maneuver.

"Because I can hear your sister's car three blocks away. And she slams doors and throws her keys on the table, you remember." She squeezed her eyes shut, suddenly still, as if she'd stopped breathing. "Besides, who else would have a key to the house besides the two of you?"

"You okay, Mom? Maybe you should lie back flat." Julia leaned forward and took her by the shoulders.

Her mom agreed. They worked together to ease her back down.

"Is there anything I can get you?" Julia's voice filled the momentary but awkward silence.

"No. The pain comes and goes. It will pass." She closed her eyes. "Tess has been good to make sure I have what I need. She moved back in the house to help the day your dad died." Julia searched her face. There were lines in her forehead, around her eyes and mouth that weren't there before. She seemed smaller than Julia remembered. Her hair was almost completely white.

"Why didn't you call me when you fell?"

"Oh, pppfffff, I'm alright. I'm always missing my step. Tess is right here. She can take care of things." She fumbled with words and watched her hands toy with the bed sheets. "I didn't want you—" her lips wavered before she continued—"to feel you had to, you know, leave your work to come out here..." She paused again and added, barely audibly, "for me."

Julia watched her, not knowing how to respond. "You need to be

more careful,” she finally said. She wanted to do the right thing by her parents, but she struggled with the mixed messages of feeling like their love for her wasn’t exactly unconditional. It was tainted by something she couldn’t put her finger on, but it made her uncomfortable. It was this sort of ambivalence that drove her to stay away as much as she could. But she didn’t like not knowing what was happening. On the other hand, it was better than being sucked into a miry cycle of manipulation and need.

“Now,” her mother said, opening her eyes. “When Nancy called to tell me about your father, she said she would find you. And I knew you would come. I sent Tess to find you at the funeral home. I knew you’d be there.”

“How are you? About Dad, I mean. Losing him so suddenly.”

“Well...now *there’s* a question. Don’t know. He doesn’t feel gone yet. He never was real talkative, except to his customers. So I can’t say I miss the conversation.”

“You’ll miss him more with time.”

“You know, you being here makes me miss him already. You’re so like him.”

“Mom,” Julia started to argue.

“No, I mean it. Just like him to move quietly. Powerfully. You’re always in control, aren’t you? Self-confident. He was intimidating to a lot of people because he was so sure about things. You’re like that. Headstrong.”

“Mom,” Julia tried to interrupt.

“I know what you’re thinking. But you’re just like him. You may not be his blood daughter, but you’re more his than Tess ever thought about being.”

“Please, Mom, I never meant to compete with Tess.” Julia suddenly realized her mom had just referred to her adoption—this was the first time the adoption had been mentioned in polite conversation since she was in high school.

“You didn’t have to. You were always closer to him.”

Julia squirmed, knowing that he had not known her any better than he’d known Tess.

Her mother continued, “Even though you’re not our natural daughter. Of course we wanted our own daughter, but you were so beautiful. Such a good baby from the minute you were born.”

The phrase polarized in Julia's mind—*the minute you were born*. Her thoughts blacked out as if she'd fallen into a great dark hole with no gravity and no pressure, suspended in a universe of nothing. She stood paralyzed. Her life had stopped, like when action in a movie pauses because the film has gotten momentarily stuck in the projector. Eventually, the individual frames clip by, accelerating until the images pass smoothly back into reality.

"Were you there when I was *born*? You never told me." Julia felt her pulse quicken, an anxiety pouring like ice through her as she tried to regain her bearings.

"Yes. And this is why I wanted to see you now, before another minute passes. Now that your father is gone, I need to tell you some things."...

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Kim Ballard

*Julia's
Quest*

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Also by Kim Ballard

*Light at
Summer's End*

**Spending summer at a farm
isn't what she had in mind.**

It's a hot Georgia afternoon, and Melissa has been dumped at a stranger's house for the entire summer...just because she's in the way at home. Worse, Miss Vellie, the owner of the farm, lives alone. Melissa is sure she'll be bored to death. Then Melissa discovers that Miss Vellie didn't even know she was coming!

 Melissa cries herself to sleep the first night...and the next....and the next. Is Melissa just homesick, or is there something deeper going on? What on earth can an angry fourteen-year-old and a retired English teacher have in common?

*For all those who have loved...and lost...and still grieve.
It will capture your heart.*

**For more information:
www.storykim.com**

About the Author



KIM BALLARD graduated from Wheaton College with a B.A. in English Literature and completed her Masters work in English Literature at the University of Central Arkansas and the University of Georgia at Athens. In addition to *Julia's Quest*, Kim has also published a young adult novel, *Light at Summer's End* (OakTara), as well as non-fiction essays and short stories. Currently she is working on two

novels. One is a series of adventures for children, and the other explores the ramifications of memory transfer. Her love of the written word affords her a broad interest, covering many genres for storytelling. As a literature and writing teacher, she enjoys passing on her passion for World Literature, American and British Literature to junior and senior high-school students.

"Light at Summer's End is dedicated to all the children who grieve the loss of their siblings because of abortion," Kim says. "The story explores the power each of us has to face painful things in our lives. Yet, God never leaves us alone in our struggles, but provides the right people at the right time to enrich us and enable us to heal."

Kim loves to hear from her readers. You may write her at:

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