

Nancy's Brother

by David James

Nancy's brother, Ronnie would wait until church was out and pull the bench up to the piano play and sing show tunes, even humming them loudly if he didn't remember the lyric. Crooning away — as if he had the lead in a Broadway musical. Well, that was part of it, but mostly it was how he would hug her friends, sit-in on girl-talk conversations and giggle along when she had her friends spend the night.

It was difficult for Ronnie when he entered middle school because that's the age when boys start kidding. They teased and laughed as he seemed to shuffle down the hall hurrying at the buzzer for his next class. Some kids would point at his stride, a sort of prissy, little waddle and smirk, some mimicking his walk. Nancy tried to protect him. Usually, Ronnie would smile at his tormenters, but sometimes it got too much and he would slip out at lunch and climb up in the old maple tree in the school yard, sit on a lower limb.

It was on a crisp, chilly day just before the Christmas holidays and Nancy wanted to talk to him about what gifts they'd get their parents. Not finding him in the hall or lunchroom, she knew where to look.

She was right. There he was at the tree, but hanging motionlessly from a limb, swinging slowly in the chilly breeze, tethered to a high limb by the long leash they used to walk their dog.

Nancy wanted to believe there was a heaven.

