

Hip Hop

by vic fortezza

Kenya Williams, eight years old, was out of bed before anyone else in her family, even Grandpa. It was Easter Sunday. She had a mission of mercy to carry out. She dressed quietly and tiptoed past her mama's bedroom. She dared not wake her new daddy, who was mean. She'd had several new daddies the past few years. None had loved her the way her real daddy had or Grandpa did. Although she knew her daddy was with God in heaven, she missed him terribly, as did her brother, who hardly spoke any more.

She opened and closed the apartment door carefully, backpack in hand. The streets were deserted, as it was just before dawn. The bad boys had finally gone home. She had waited until their voices died down. She went into the alley and to the back of the building, where her Grandpa, the super, kept the small cage.

"Good morning, Jesus," she said to a plump white rabbit.

Her Grandpa had objected to the name, saying it was disrespectful, and told her to choose another. She had, but still thought of the rabbit as Jesus. She lifted it gently from the cage, petted it tenderly and placed it in the backpack. It remained as docile and trusting of her as always.

"This is the day of your eman..., emanci.... — your freedom."

Her brother had made her cry, saying the rabbit would be their Easter dinner. Her Grandpa immediately came to her comfort. When she asked if it were true, she could tell by his hesitation and tone that it was. She recalled how the rabbits had "run away" the past two Easters. Her mother had told her they were having chicken. No wonder the birds had looked so odd.

The day was going to be glorious, the sky brightening to a pristine blue, not a cloud in sight. Kenya smiled, basking in life's wonders. She did not understand why others did not see the beauty of the world, why everybody was always so mad. She hurried to the park, breathless, surprised at how heavy Jesus was, at how much he had grown the past year. She wished she would grow as fast. She went

into the woods and opened the backpack. Jesus remained in it obediently. She took the rabbit in her hands and kissed its nose.

"Will you remember me when Mama brings us here?" she said, looking into its eyes, which stared blankly. "I'll look for you."

She was startled by raucous laughter, and cradled Jesus protectively to her chest. Ahead, milling around benches, she spotted a group of bad boys. There were bottles at their feet. Soon a boom box was blaring. "The devil's music," her daddy had called it. He'd always been chasing boys from the front of the house. She did not understand why the music was so different from the sweet records her Grandpa was always playing, from what she would be hearing in church later today. She so wanted to be in that choir.

She set Jesus down and pointed him in the opposite direction of the bad boys. The rabbit took a labored step and another, then a hipp-hop, and then began a hippity-hop. Kenya was amazed at how boldly the white coat stood out in the surroundings. Jesus seemed like an angel. She had to tear herself away. She was unable to resist a final glance.

"Bye. I love you."

Head down, she left the park, tears flowing down her cheeks.

Free of his cage, the rabbit moseyed along, sniffing, exploring, circling, covering ground.

"What's that?" said a young man in gangsta garb, springing from a bench, switching off the boom box.

One of his companions jumped to his feet, pulling a handgun from his belt. "Target practice."

A shot rang out. Outside the park, Kenya, weeping, came to an abrupt halt, listening. It was the same sound that had killed her daddy, soaked his white shirt red in an instant, as she sat on the sidewalk drawing with chalk he'd bought her. Hoots and hollers ensued. She broke into a sprint and did not look back.

