

Model Text:
from *Whistling Past the Graveyard* by Susan Crandall

“Whistling past the graveyard. That’s what Daddy called it when you did something to keep your mind off your most worstest fear. Ghosts and zombies had nothin’ on Wallace the Bear, so I wished I could whistle. Maybe by the time I finished my song, I’d be through the storm, away from Wallace, safe on the highway, picked up by some nice preacher on his way to Nashville to give a Sunday sermon.

But I couldn’t whistle, even though both Daddy and Patti Lynn had tried to teach me. So I always had to do my whistling in my head. And the storm that let loose was the worst ever in the history of the world.

The easy wind got wild. Dirt and twigs hit me like hot pepper, stinging my skin, especially my raw shins. When the lightning flashed, I could see the wind bend the trees nearly halfway to the ground, then toss them back. Long grapevines reached out from where they hung from branches, whipping me as I passed. In the places where kudzu covered the trees, they looked like giant monsters waving their arms and ducking their heads to eat whatever animal, or little girl, passed by. The wind shoved me this way and that, so when I leaned against it, it just switched around and pushed me from another direction.

Then the rain really started. It came so hard that even with my head bent down I had to squint my eyes. James busted out crying, the sound snatched up by the wind and carried who knows where, probably right to Wallace’s bedroom. James did sound a little like a catamount, so maybe Wallace wouldn’t pay any attention (please, please, baby Jesus).

I kept moving forward, my shoes squishing with every sloppy step.

A loud crack sounded over the storm, the sound of a splintering tree trunk. The tree crashed against others, a dinosaur in the woods. I stopped dead and squeezed baby James tight, waiting for it to hit, hoping it wouldn’t be on us.

It wasn’t, but it was close enough the ground shook under my feet.

I wished I’d left James in the bedroom; at least then he’d be dry and warm and he wouldn’t starve to death. I hadn’t even got to the swamp yet. Carrying James, I was moving like a turtle, not the jackrabbit Daddy always said I was.

The good thing about storms this strong was they didn’t last long. It might rain for the rest of the night, but I could walk in the rain; heck, I couldn’t get any wetter. Right now I was just glad not to be squished under a fallen tree.”