

Unconditional Love

by Emily Rose Cardé

Sarah shivered and hugged herself closely as she heard the wind whistle through the trees. Her thin raincoat did little to protect her against the sharp chill in the air. She put her hands to her face and blew warm air onto them. It was going to be a long day.

The shelter had thrown her out after she struck a staff member the night before. The woman had offered to take her to church. Sarah retorted by giving her a bloody nose. She was just glad that she was not sitting in a cell. The middle-aged woman, Rebecca, had refused to press charges and had even offered to let Sarah stay in her apartment. Sarah could not understand how someone could even suggest that after what happened. Her pride had forced her to refuse, and she chose instead to sleep on the streets. She had called the woman several names that she wished she could take back, but then again, Sarah had told Rebecca that she didn't want to go to church—end of story.

Sarah's life seemed to be a downward spiral ever since she got out of high school. She was sure that none of the colleges would accept her due to her poor grades, but she never bothered trying.

Sarah swung at the air imagining there was someone who deserved the blow. Violence was the only way to get what she wanted. She couldn't get a permanent job and wouldn't take charity. The shelter had been the rare exception. She did some odd jobs, but it was never enough to get her a home. Violence was all she had ever known. She never had a family, at least not a real one. It was just foster home after foster home. She had to fight to survive. None of the families had ever cared about her. She swung at the air again.

"Sarah."

Sarah looked up and rolled her eyes at Rebecca, wondering how they had ended up in the same place.

"What are you doin' here? Lookin' for more trouble?" Sarah asked with her meanest voice.

"I figured I'd find you around here somewhere. I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"Yeah, thought you'd find me in the slums!" Sarah was in no mood for the meddling woman. "Don't you have Church or something today? You know got to fulfill your duties to God."

"The Lord put it on my heart to find you."

Sarah laughed with a low grunt. "Oh, wow, God put it on Rebecca's heart to help the poor homeless person. How sweet," Sarah pretended to be touched.

"I thought you might be cold, so I brought you a jacket," Rebecca said while handing a

huge down jacket to Sarah.

Sarah looked at the coat, several ideas popping into her head. She would just refuse it, or she could shove it into the muddy street. Pride had shoved its way into every aspect of her life. She looked into Rebecca's eyes. They were full of concern and care. Sarah could not help but take the jacket and put it on. It immediately warmed her. A sigh escaped her dry lips.

"Thanks." Sarah tried to keep her harsh voice but knew it had lost a lot of its effect. The kindness of the woman had started to soften her heart.

"I hope it serves you well," Rebecca smiled and walked away.



Rebecca hurried to Redeemer Presbyterian Church. She knew that her trip to see Sarah would cause her to miss Sunday school, but she would not miss church.

The pastor was on the second installment of a three-part sermon on Love. Every word he spoke touched her heart. She knew the coat was not enough. She had been trying to reach out to Sarah ever since she first came to the shelter several weeks earlier. Rebecca could not recall ever meeting a person so cold or so firm on her disbelief in God. She just wanted to be a Godly influence to the young woman. Rebecca had once been in a similar situation.

Rebecca could remember the time twenty long years before when she had toured the streets for a year. She was just nineteen and freshly graduated. She discovered quickly how hard life was out there. It was a fend-for-yourself kind of world. She still remembered the first time she had gone to church. The church had advertised a free dinner for those who wanted good fellowship. She had not cared too much about God, but food was always a good word. The friendly environment and kind people had shocked her. Her own home had never been that way, and the streets certainly weren't kind or friendly. The next Sunday she returned. Once the church people found out that she was living on the streets, they immediately helped her out with everything she could need. Before long, they had set her up with a job and a small apartment.

Rebecca knew she would never be able to repay the people who had helped her for all of their kindness.

She thanked God silently while the pastor concluded his message, also praying that she would be able to help Sarah in the same way that she had been helped years ago.

The next day Rebecca went back to the street where she had found Sarah. Sure enough, Sarah was standing nearby, leaned against a tall building. The building was old and decrepit, almost looking as if Sarah's body weight would knock it down though she was slender.

Rebecca walked over to her. "Good afternoon, Sarah."

"What the heck are you doing here?"

"I came to take you to lunch."

The matter-of-fact tone bothered Sarah. "Why would I go to lunch with you?"

"Because when you are on the streets, food is the most important thing."

"How would you know?"

"I'll tell you over a meal."

"Make it pizza and I'll join."

"It's a deal!"

Sarah walked behind Rebecca, excited about the pizza she could almost smell already.

They entered Papa Roe's Pizza Parlor only two blocks away from what Sarah called home. Rebecca ordered a large deep-dish pepperoni pizza after inquiring upon Sarah's favorite. They sat down at a table to wait for the food.

"Now, you said you would tell me how you know what's so important to us homeless people." Sarah held up quote fingers when she said the last part.

"I was homeless for a year."

"Sure homeless, as in you didn't have a home, so you stayed with a friend."

Rebecca couldn't help but to let out a chuckle. "Not quite. More like homeless as in living on the streets, never knowing if I was going to get my next meal."

Sarah could not conceal her surprise. "Are you serious?"

Rebecca nodded her head.

Sarah suddenly felt a wave of respect for this woman. She had gotten out of her situation and was now living comfortably. "How did you...uh...you know, get a life?"

"I went to a free lunch at church,"

"So you really don't have a life then, just church and all that junk!"

"I'll tell you my story." Rebecca began the narrative of her life from graduation day to the present. As soon as she had finished her story, the pizza arrived. Sarah grabbed a slice and took a bite. Once she finished chewing, she just stared at Rebecca for a while. It was hard believe that the pleasant woman sitting in front of her had ever lived on the streets, yet Sarah was sure that she was telling the truth.

"Okay so why did you pick me? I mean of all the people out there that you could have helped, why chose the most stubborn jerk of them all?"

"You need me the most, and love is unconditional. It doesn't matter if you are the worst person in the world. God still wants you, and you need him."

"I don't need anything, you or God. I can't believe you even think your little scheme will succeed."

"Love never fails."

Sarah found herself wanting to believe this woman. Somewhere deep inside she wanted to be loved, but her cold outer layer took over. "It failed me!"

"You've never had real love."

Rebecca gave a silent petition to God: Please open her eyes LORD. She needs you whether she knows it or not. She needs Love and you are Love.

"I've never had any kind of love."

"That just proves that you need God's love. It is the most powerful thing in the world."

Sarah looked at Rebecca, with a light in her eyes. "You love me don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"I'll make a deal with you. I'll go to church to your church, and if I find this Love that you are talking about. I'll let it in."

"You'll let God in?"

"Yeah, and Rebecca, I'm sorry about the other day."

Rebecca smiled, praising the Almighty in her heart. "I forgive you."

The Beginning



Emily Rose Cardé is a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church and attends Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, VA. where she is set to graduate in 2015. She has faithfully served CPC by performing back up keyboard for the congregational singing. In addition, Emily is a published author. Her inspirational romantic suspense novella, *ICU*, has given enjoyment to readers of many ages. Pastor Randy Martin said this of *ICU*, "It has all the romantic appeal of the *Twilight* series, without the vampires, and from a Christian worldview." More information about Emily and *ICU* is available online at <http://icubook.wordpress.com>.