

“Ima”

from Wendy (more on www.FellowshipOfTheMartyrs.com)

"Excuse me!" Ima snapped to the cashier at Betty's Bag It & Go, "but the price on that lipstick is \$1.19, not \$1.49." She looked at Ima, expressionless (as most cashiers do), and without a word subtracted the thirty cents from her total. Ima was convinced that the cashier did it on purpose. It seemed she was always having a problem with cashiers, no matter where she went. Well, she was tired of it, and if her temper sometimes frayed a bit, she was sure that God would understand.

Ima counted out the exact amount of her total in cash, and set it on the counter. Without a word or a backward glance, she picked up the groceries and marched out, making sure that the door to the small store slammed in her wake. She wanted to let them know just how irritated she was over their attempt to cheat her.

Ima got in her new white Cadillac and shut the door. She turned the car on and relaxed as she listened to an upbeat song on her favorite rock station. She flipped the visor down and admired her beautiful, blonde hair. It only took 2 hours at the beauty salon, under the tender ministrations of Lucille, to make her perfect. Every hair was in place. But then, her hair couldn't have escaped if it had wanted to, for it was imprisoned with a nearly visible layer of hair spray. If someone had reached out to touch her hair, the entire side of her head would have moved. But that was a small price to pay for perfection. She couldn't wait to get to church to see who was wearing what. She was sure that she would outdo them all. And if she didn't, well then, Lucille wouldn't get her \$2 tip next week.

Ima eased the car out into the main stretch of highway. She looked around for police cars, and when she didn't see any, she accelerated to 80 mph. As she pulled onto the exit ramp to her church, she quickly changed her car stereo to a Christian radio station. She didn't really like to listen to it, but it wouldn't do for anyone to see anything but Christian music in her car. It was for that reason that she didn't set any of the programmable buttons to the stations she really did like to listen to. Ima didn't see anything wrong with her taste in music, personally, but there were some "fanatics" in the church who went overboard on things. It wouldn't do to not fit in at church. Appearances were everything.

But Ima should have been paying attention to her driving, because as she leaned back from changing the station, her car flew off of the exit ramp and fell 15 feet into the canal below. Ima wasn't wearing her seatbelt, but the airbag immediately blew up in her face as she screamed. Unfortunately, the power of the bag exploding outward snapped her head back into the seat, and knocked her unconscious.

Then the most amazing thing happened.

Ima awoke to find herself in a courtroom. What in the world?, she thought. She looked around. She was sitting in the defendant's seat. She looked to her right, and saw a crisp young man in a dark business suit. Her mouth fell open.

"Who are you?" she asked incredulously. The man smiled at her, and offered his hand. "I'm D'Fence, Miss Tattler. I'm your attorney. May I call you Ima?" His eyes were blue and very gentle, and she smiled her best smile as she shook his hand.

"But of course you may," she replied sweetly. She always could sound very sweet when she wanted to. "But I'm confused. What is this place? Why am I here?"

"Why, this is your trial, Ima," he said gently. He placed his hand on her shoulder in a comforting motion.

"My trial?" Ima looked completely perplexed. "What have I done?"

"That's what we are going to find out, Ima. This *is* Judgment Day, after all," D'Fence replied smoothly, and bent over the table to arrange his paperwork.

Ima sat back, stunned. Judgment Day? But then, that meant.. She was dead! Oh no! She remembered now, her

car going over the cliff, into the canal. She remembered her head hitting the seat, and then she was here. This was terrible! She had just bought that car! Her hairdo had to be ruined, for certain!

"All rise!" The clerk's booming voice brought her back to attention, and she looked in front of her as the most Marvelous, pure white light entered the room. She gasped, for it was the brightest light that ever she had seen, yet it did not hurt to look at it. She knew immediately, *knew*, that it was God. The Light radiated waves of love such as she had never before known. She almost wept with the intensity of it. She longed to reach out, to touch The Light. To touch Him. God. At the same time, it was all she could do not to crawl under the table and hide from Him. What a curious thing! This was God. She'd known Him all her life. Why should she hide?

The Light took the Judge's seat. "You may be seated," the clerk said, and everyone sat. It was then that Ima realized that there were many people in the room. She looked around, and saw more people than she could count. She couldn't even see where the room ended, it was so large. How could this be, she wondered. But she knew. *With God, all things are possible.*

"This is the life of Ima Tattler," said the clerk, and then he sat down. That was odd, Ima thought, frowning. In Perry Mason, it was always the person versus someone else. Who was accusing her? What sort of trial was this?

The Prosecutor stood up. He had the same clean, young look as her own attorney. Was he an angel? She thought he must be. They both must be. Where were their wings? She chided herself. She knew that angels could assume the appearance of mankind, when they wished.

"Great and Mighty God, All Glory and Honor and Praise be to Your Name, forever and ever," the Prosecutor said, kneeling. The Light radiated a wave of approval, and the Prosecutor rose.

"My LORD, we intend to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the defendant, Miss Ima Tattler, is not a Christian. Miss Tattler went to great lengths to put on a show of being a Christian, and of that, we hold no argument. But is it the same thing as *being* a Christian? No, it isn't. We have evidence that proves that her lifestyle was a facade. We intend to submit that evidence to You today, my LORD." The Prosecutor sat down.

As he had spoken, Ima felt herself go hot with shame, then anger. Who was this angel, to think of accusing her so? How did *he* know what she, Ima Tattler, was or was not? She steeled herself with Indignant fury. Did he think he could come in here, and with a few simple sentences, invalidate her entire life? Well, they would show him. She silently wished D'Fence luck.

D'Fence stood up. "Wondrous and Great and Mighty God, Your Name be Praised in the Highest forever and ever," he said, kneeling. Again, The Light radiated a wave of approval, and D'Fence stood.

"My LORD, the Prosecutor is wasting all of our time here today. It's clear to see that my client has been faithful in church attendance all her life. Has she not given of her time and money to the church? Surely anyone can see that she is a Christian. We intend to refute and utterly squash any so-called "evidence" that the Prosecution may or may not actually have." D'Fence sat down.

Ima felt pretty good about D'Fence after that. She looked at the Prosecutor smugly. Beat *that*, she thought.

The clerk spoke then. "Let the defence begin." What was this? Wait, wasn't the Prosecutor supposed to go first? This was highly unusual! Oh well, if it didn't work out, perhaps she could get a mistrial declared later.

D'Fence immediately rose. "I would like to call Ima Tattler to the stand."

Ima froze in her seat. Where were all the other witnesses? Was she it? Why would D'Fence call her first? How many witnesses did he have? D'Fence nudged her, and she woodenly rose from her seat and crept to the witness stand. She couldn't believe it. She was sitting *right next to God!* She tried not to look at Him.

"Good morning, Ima," D'Fence said with a smile. "May I call you Ima?"

Ima was so overwhelmed by the Presence of God that she only meekly nodded her head.

"Ima, are you a Christian?" D'Fence's first question was so easy!

"Of course," she replied, drawing herself up straight in the chair.

"How old are you, Ima?"

"28."

"Do you go to church?"

"Yes, I do. Every service."

"How long have you been going to church, Ima?"

"Since I was a little girl. My parents are proper, and they saw to it that I was in church every service," Ima replied to these questions easily. This wasn't as bad as she thought it would be!

"Are you active in the church?" D'Fence's tone and manner were so warm that most of her nervousness left her.

"Yes, I am. I sing in the choir, and at one point, I taught Sunday School. Of course, I always bring a big meal to the fellowships. No one cooks Blackberry pie like Ima Tattler!" She laughed then, and most of the courtroom chuckled with her.

"Did you ever go out on visitation or door knocking with the church, Ima?"

Ima shifted in her seat. "Well, I was there. I usually took care of the children while the others went out. Someone had to do it."

"But you were there?"

"Yes, I was there. Almost always." She breathed a sigh of relief.

"What sort of person were you?"

"I was a good person," Ima said defensively. "I went to church when the neighbors slept in. I didn't go around dressed like them. I was always done up right proper in church. I gave money to God in the offering plate. I sang the songs with everyone, not like some people in the church who just sat there or mumbled them out. No sir, I belted those songs out! I did everything I was supposed to do! I don't understand why I'm here. I was a good person!"

"Of course you were, Ima," D'Fence said smoothly. "You were a very good person. No further questions, my LORD." D'Fence returned to his seat and sat down.

The Prosecutor stood and made his way to her side. He smiled.

"Good morning, Miss Tattler. How are you today?"

"I've been better," Ima replied, trying not to let the irritation in her voice show.

"Miss Tattler, do you consider yourself a Christian?" The first question hit her as ridiculously simple.

"But of course I am a Christian!" she retorted hotly.

The Prosecutor's smile didn't waver. "And what is a Christian?"

"What?" Ima was nonplused. "What do you mean? I'm a Christian."

"Yes, Miss Tattler. But exactly what *is* a Christian? Is it a good person?" His voice was smooth and even.

"Objection!" D'Fence stood as he shouted. "Counsel is leading the witness."

"I withdraw that part of the question, my LORD," the Prosecutor said without hesitation. "Miss Tattler. What is a Christian?"

Ima sat back in the witness chair and thought long and hard.

"Well, it's a person who believes in God and goes to church. Someone who is basically a good person and doesn't sin too much." She fidgeted in her seat. Somehow she knew that wasn't quite right, but it was the best answer she could come up with.

"Do all Christians go to heaven, Ima?"

"Well, sure. If they are good enough."

"And what is good enough?" He had her there. What was good enough?

"I guess if your good outweighs your bad, then you get to go to Heaven," she said nervously. She was beginning to sweat. What if her good hadn't outweighed her bad? Was that why they were here? What happened to her if she "lost" this court battle?

To her surprise, the Prosecutor looked at her with sad, compassionate eyes. What was going on here?

"What if I told you, Miss Tattler," he began as he walked towards his table and lifted a large black Bible into his hands, "that the attributes you just described have nothing to do with whether or not a person is a Christian?"

"Then I'd say you were wrong!" Ima's stomach clenched. That's what she believed all her life. It *had* to be that way! It just had to! But as the Prosecutor deftly turned the pages of The Book, her life's ruling beliefs quavered.

"The Bible is very clear, Ima. In Romans 3:10, it says, *"As it is written, there are none righteous, no, not one:"* In Ephesians 2:8-9, it says *"For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* If no one is righteous, Ima, then how can you be "good enough" to get into heaven? If you cannot achieve salvation by works, i.e., being good, how then can you work enough, or be good enough, to get into heaven?"

Ima's heart was racing. She was certain that she was going to pass out.

"How, by yourself, will you be worthy of Heaven? Worthy to stand before God for all eternity?"

"But.. but.." Ima stammered, searching desperately for an answer to refute what she was hearing.

"Is that not enough for you, Miss Tattler?" The Prosecutor flipped to another passage. "In Isaiah 64:6, the Bible says, *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*" He looked up from the Word and his eyes pierced her soul. "Is that what you have come to offer The LORD? A filthy rag?"

"But Aunt Susan said that all I had to do was go to church, and be a good person, and then I would go to heaven!" Ima burst out, trembling as she heard the reading of the Word of God.

"I see. Miss Tattler, do you own a Bible?"

"Yes, yes of course I do!"

"How long have you had a copy of the Bible?"

"I've always had a Bible, even as a small child."

"Do you read it, Miss Tattler?"

"Well, yes. In church, I follow along with the pastor, just like everyone else." Ima blushed furiously.

"So what you are telling us, Miss Tattler, is that even though you had the written Word of God for twenty odd years, you never looked to see for yourself what God had to say about the path to Heaven?"

Ima couldn't speak. What could she say? Everything around her was crumbling. But D'Fence had been so good! She looked over to him, desperate, but his eyes were fixed upon the writing pad on the table in front of him. He looked tremendously sad.

"Miss Tattler?" The Prosecutor's words (and how ironic that they seemed touched with genuine concern) brought her back to the present.

"I.. I thought I was doing the right thing. I was misled!" What else could she say? Surely this would be enough. Surely God would understand!

The Prosecutor turned silently in the Bible. "II Timothy 2:15, *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" He stopped, and again, his eyes pierced her. "It is *your* responsibility, Miss Tattler, to find out what God has said to do. How can you blame someone for "misleading" you, Miss Tattler, when you held the Truth in your hands for over twenty years? Are you saying that, in twenty years time, you could not find the time to discover for yourself what God required?"

She looked at him, her eyes wide.

"But I *know* God!" she protested weakly.

"Miss Tattler, do you know who the president of the United States was in 1986?"

"Yes. It was Ronald Reagan."

"Have you ever met Ronald Reagan?"

"Well, no. I've never met him."

"So would it be safe to say, Miss Tattler, that although you knew *of* Ronald Reagan, and you knew who Ronald Reagan was, and even though you might have known things about him, that you never really knew *him*?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "I didn't know him personally."

"Did you know God, personally?"

"What?" Ima looked startled.

"Did you ever, just once in your life, pray to God, and ask Him to come into your heart, and to save you? Did you ever make your relationship with God personal? Or was it just that you knew things *about* God?" The Prosecutor's words bit into her, searing her soul.

Ima burst into tears. The conviction she felt at this moment was utterly overwhelming, as everything she had ever believed, the "truths" she had sheltered herself with, were torn away, one by one, by the Holy Word of God. Finally, in her desperation, she turned to The Light, to God, to plead with Him.

"Please, please God! You know I was a good person! What should I have done? What was it that you wanted from me? I went to church my whole life! I was a good person! I sacrificed for you! What did I miss? What was it that I was supposed to do? What more do you want from me? Wasn't it enough?" Ima sobbed, almost in hysterics.

The Light never wavered. The Prosecutor turned the pages in the Bible. Ima thought she had never heard such a terrible sound as the ones she heard just then - the unmistakable sound of the thin pages of the Bible being turned.

"John 3:18, *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*"

"Don't you love me, God?" Ima wailed. "I thought you were supposed to love me?"

"II Peter 3:9, *...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*"

"No! You don't love me! What did you ever do for ME, God!" Ima screamed, angry now. Angry, and terrified.

"John 3:16, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever should believe on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

"Sure. If I was good enough. THEN you would save me. Is that it?"

"Romans 5:8, *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"

She wept bitter tears.

"Romans 10:13, *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.*"

Ima collapsed into the chair, sobbing. She was defeated. She knew that now. The truth had been there all along. She had heard it all her life, in the Baptist church she had grown up in. How many times had the Invitation been given, and she had never gone forward? How many times had she felt the touch of God on her heart, and she had been too proud to come to Him?

Now it was too late.

"What's going to happen to me?" Ima sobbed, her entire body shaking, trembling with terror.

For the very first time, The Light spoke. It was a tremendous sound, and it seemed to Ima that, had this not been Heaven, it would have shaken not only the room, but the very earth with it's force.

LET THE BOOKS BE BROUGHT.

Then, for the first time, she saw Him. Jesus. There He was, unmistakable in His Glory, light shining from the scars in His Hands and Feet. He carried in His Hands an enormous white book, and yet, He bore it as if it had no weight at all. He turned the pages, searching. His Eyes were sad when He looked up to The Light.

"**Her name is not written here, Father,**" Jesus said, and He looked at Ima. "**She is not one of Mine.**"

"What's going to happen to me?" Ima's voice quavered as she whispered.

The Prosecutor turned again the pages of the Bible.

"Revelation 20:15, *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*"

"No." The word barely escaped Ima's lips, in her horror.

The Light spoke again. For the final time.

DEPART FROM ME, YE WORKER OF INIQUITY. I NEVER KNEW YOU.

"NO!!!" Ima screamed as two large angels (these had wings, beautiful, strong white wings, full of power, but that was of no comfort to her now) appeared by her side, and took her by the arms.

"Mercy, God! Show mercy!"

But God had shown mercy. God had loved her so much, that He had died for her. He had not paid for her with silver or gold. Nor had He given His own Life. But something more precious to the Father than even Himself, He had given His Only Begotten Son for her. But she had never accepted the Son in her heart. She had never believed that it was that simple, that just accepting Jesus into her heart was enough. Instead, she had tried to work her way to heaven. She had done good things. *They are as a filthy rag before God.* Isn't that what the Word had to say about all of her "good things"? She had come before Almighty God with her filthy rags, instead of the beautiful garment that had been prepared just for her. Come before Him, and then was surprised when she was turned away.

Even as she screamed for mercy, she knew it was too late. What was it Ecclesiastes had to say?

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. For 28 years, she had access to all of God's Mercy and Grace. For 28 years, she had time to make a decision for God. Time to accept Jesus. Time to *know* Him, instead of knowing *of* Him. The time for Mercy was over. The time for Judgment was here.

As the angels drug her from the room, weeping, screaming, she saw the seat that The Light sat in. It wasn't a seat at all. It was a throne. And it was white.

THE END