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## **Thirteen Weeks On The Last Mile Bus**

By C. A. Caldwell

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# 13 WEEKS ON THE LAST MILE BUS



**C.A. Caldwell**

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Scripture references from Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV).

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## SUNDAY

January 20, 2019

Grady purposely left the TV off all morning because he knew the only programs to watch were bad news or church and the last thing he needed right now was fire and brimstone on top of a horrendous hangover.

He drank a beer in the shower to take off the edge; had another after dropping the towel on the floor; then spent the rest of the morning moping around in his robe, searching for some food to settle his stomach or something to snack on.

He came up empty after checking the cooler, so he wolfed down a few stale bread sticks he found on the floor while he flipped through the TV viewing guide and passed some time by planning the lineup for his pre-game shows and viewing.

There was basketball *and* great football today—the NFL Conference Championship games.

*Why do they **do** that to us?*

After some careful consideration and one more beer, he decided to watch as much as he could of all of them –starting with the Raptors and Grizzlies at 1:00; tuning into the Rams and the Saints at 3:05; then beginning at 6:00, he'd toggle between the Bucks and the Thunder and the Pats and the Chiefs; then watch the final quarter of the Lakers and Rockets.

When it finally came time to order his pizza, he was sprawled out in his chair sloppy drunk, just trying to make it through the weekend.

And when he finally switched on the TV at one o'clock prepared to watch the first tip-off, he discovered that for some inexplicable reason, every fast-food restaurant in the world was running advertisements for Chicken Nuggets that day...basketball ...football...early or late...it didn't matter.

It was like water torture to Grady...death one drop at a time.

*A-gain? A-gain?*

*Why? Why? Why to-day?*

He pushed the mute button, but the sound was still in his head...and the memory of the fearful look in Sonti's eyes haunted him.

*Let it go, Redwine! He was twenty feet away. It could have been your imagination. It's obvious that his family adores him. Let it go!*

He couldn't.

## WEEK THREE

### MONDAY

*January 21, 2019*

#### *Martin Luther King Holiday*

Grady woke up to a *Martin Luther King Memorial Day Special* blasting from his TV. He loved to watch sports with the volume on high, but news specials, not so much...especially with a dull pounding behind his eyes.

He located his remote buried in the ruins of the weekend and surveyed the evidence of his wasted days. He lowered the volume and thought, *Well, you only drank beer, no hard stuff. You only ordered medium pizzas, and you DID leave a slice for breakfast. That's something, anyway.*

Grady chomped on the extra slice as he shuffled into the bathroom; leaned on the sink as he chewed and looked in the mirror. Staring back at him was a face flushed and blotchy with dark circles under puffy, bloodshot eyes.

He took a sharp indrawn breath and looked away.

*Mary would be so proud of you today, Redwine. So very proud.*

He cleared his throat, producing a long, phlegmy cough, ran his tongue over fuzzy teeth, then threw back a couple of pain pills with a handful of water, and swallowed.

Returning his attention to the mirror, he rubbed his hands over his face and scratched the scruff along his jaw. He would shave tomorrow. Maybe grow a beard.

He caught his reflection in the shower door when he opened it to turn on the water; sucked in his gut; heaved a sigh and stepped inside. Surges of sadness and shame flowed along with the stream cascading down his body.

*Twice, Redwine. Twice in a month you've done this. It's time to put a full stop to it all and face the music.*

###

In their lives together, when something went awry with him, Mary would expect repentance and an act of contrition, which to Grady, meant apologize and then do something nice to make up for it. He learned early on that the apology had to be *sincere*, and *something nice* did not mean "go buy

flowers.” In order to be forgiven and for the *something nice* to count, you had to do something *hard*...something that required *sacrifice*.

Grady knew just taking a shower and cleaning the house wasn’t nearly *nice* enough to make up for his irresponsible weekend. He had to do something *genuinely hard*.

*Hardest* would be not watching the *Comets* game that afternoon. He thought about the situation awhile and decided he wasn’t quite that sorry, so if he gave up watching such a crucial game, he’d automatically be disqualified for being insincere. He decided it would be best to just stick to the basics: *sincere* and *hard*.

He’d start with cleaning the house and figure out the *hard* part as he worked.

###

After he showered, Grady went ahead and added shave to the *nice* list, then began the cleaning process. He gathered up all the empty beer cans and old fast-food wrappers circling the trash basket in the corner and tossed them into a garbage bag along with the chicken bones and leftover salsa.

He then tackled the table beside the front door, jamming the junk mail in with the other trash and neatly stacking his bills. When he came across Ryan’s envelope again, he hesitated and turned it around in his hands for a while, thinking.

On the one hand, he’d accepted the note from Ryan, but never really intended to read it. On the other hand, it felt incredibly wrong just to throw it away.

*I thought your mission was contrition, Redwine.*

*Contrition for Mary. Not contrition for Ryan.*

*How about contrition for you?*

He struggled with his conscience a little longer and finally surrendered.

*Well, Hell.*

He sat on the couch, opened the envelope and flattened out two water-stained pages. The first was an easy read:

*Weep not for what you have lost, fight for what you have.*

*Weep not for what is dead, fight for what was born in you.*

*Weep not for the one who abandoned you, fight for who is with you.*

*Weep not for those who hate you, fight for those who want you.*

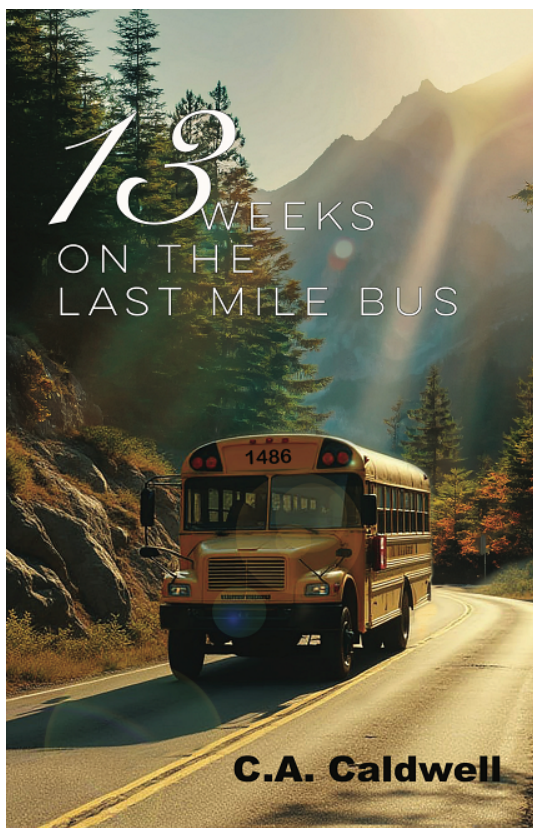
*Weep not for your past, fight for your present struggle.*

*Weep not for your suffering, fight for your happiness.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C.A. Caldwell has an unyielding commitment to doing what she can to make the world a better place for children with *Special Needs*, because she believes that everyone has the right to thrive and reach their full potential. Her unusual career path has given her a unique 360-degree view of *Special Needs* issues...at home interacting with the *Special* kids in her family...in the classroom as a substitute teacher...and on a school bus as a monitor, helping get challenged children to school. Her background in business consulting gave her additional insight into the economic and legal conflicts that create many of the educational issues she encountered, and they are often reflected in her writing. She is hoping that this book will bring some of them to the surface, create awareness among the people who can bring about change, and present an example of effective advocacy as well.





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