

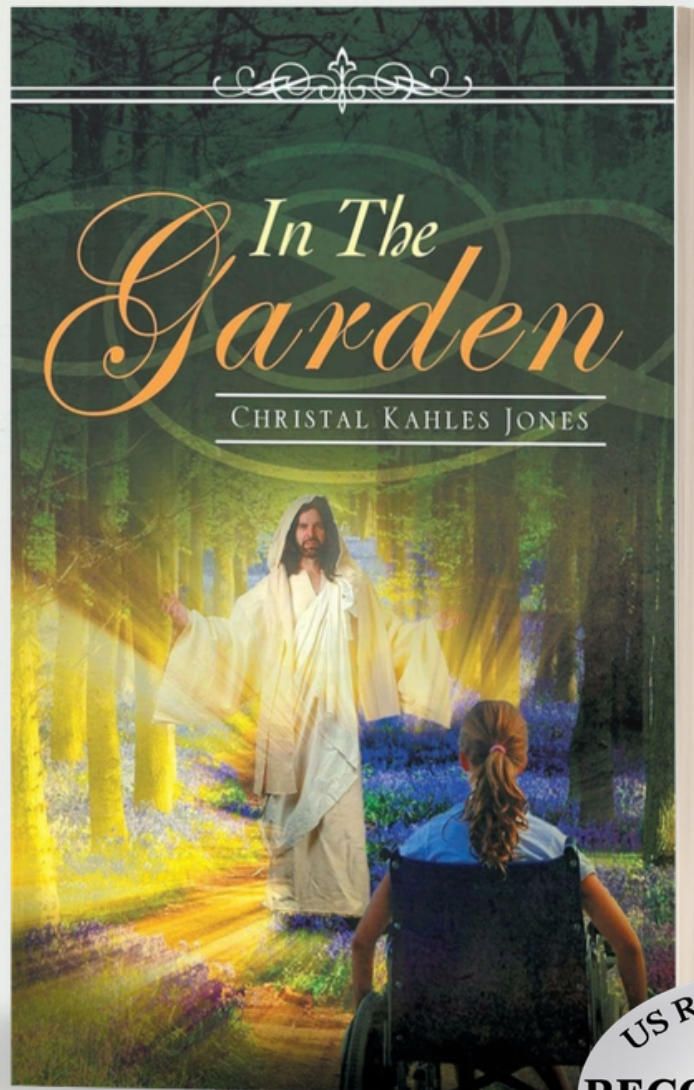


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IN THE GARDEN

CHRISTAL KAHLES-JONES

"The garden sparkled with God's natural beauty from the glow of the morning sunrise to the bright colors He painted in the sky at sunset."



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The author has created a stirring panorama of family, forbearance, faith, and the importance of persistence amid seemingly insurmountable challenges. Laura is a teen confined to a wheelchair after a childhood accident, and her twin sister, Lindsey, is burdened by bipolar disorder. They live with their mother, Trudy, all longing to reunite with their father, James, who is serving overseas during World War II.

Laura is strengthened by her Christian convictions, enhanced by a walk in the family garden where she has a vision of heaven and hears God assuring her that He is with her. Lindsey, by contrast, is not drawn to her family's Christian beliefs, even blatantly scorning Laura's account of her etheric experiences. Still, the group's cohesion abides in their collective concerns for Lindsey's afflictions, her struggles to overcome them, and their encouragement for Laura when she decides to study to become a missionary.

While traveling to college, Laura meets Brian, a young man with Down syndrome who is doing his best to gain a foothold in conventional life, and through him, she encounters Matt, who will prove a charming companion. Their alliance, and the absorption of life's lessons as the three progress together, are skillfully arrayed by the author, interweaving slowly blooming romance, distressing crises, and the rewards accompanying sincere bonding. Events will unfold that affect each one with a sense of shared fate and deep-seated compassion.

When Lindsey breaks ties with her sister and mother for a time, she faces dangers she never anticipated, followed by an affirming communication with the very deity that she had for so long scorned. As Laura grows ever closer to Matt, the two will cope with a sudden calamitous upheaval that will yield, for Laura, a miraculous alteration. Trudy thankfully observes the gradual melding of the group, with remarkable outcomes including the reuniting of her two daughters as they develop shared professional ambitions to help those with handicaps. When James returns, and Matt and Laura profess their mutual deep love, long-held wishes and prayers will be fulfilled, with their garden providing the perfect ambiance.

The author, whose life gently mirrors that of her two courageous female characters, battled special needs as a child. In isolation, she began to pursue her writing talents. Her efforts were rewarded with a Young Author's Award from Verses Magazine and admission into the International Authors Registry. Noting her significant efforts in her college years, professors encouraged her to continue her writing endeavors. Her novel has garnered significant attention. It has been adapted into a screenplay and is in preparation as a film.

As someone who has taken on life's exigencies despite demanding deficits, her story, brightly illustrated with photographic images, encompasses her personal mission to infuse those with disabilities with the determination to push ever forward, dare to dream, and move beyond their limitations as she has done. The result is an enjoyable, highly readable parable that will doubtless be appreciated by those with comparable needs and by their families and others concerned with and devoted to the goals she shares.

Reviewed by:

Barbara Bamberger Scott, The US Review of Books