

## ***CALCULATING GRACE***

Story excerpt from

**CHLORA'S LITTLE GOODY BOOK OF THE MONTH: *October***

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Photography by Rice R. Jackson, III

*\* indicates links in the online version, to be released soon on [www.gingergeyer.com](http://www.gingergeyer.com) )*

*.....at the school Halloween carnival, where Chlora has to work in one of the booths)*

All Chlora had to do today in the Go Fishing booth was take the money and make change. Change itself was bad, but making change was petrifying if you were not scary smart in math. To relieve her math block, Chlora sneaked in her Dad's T.I. calculator.

\*



TI Calculator, from Calculating Grace

Chlora was better at adding and multiplying  
than she was at subtracting and dividing.  
She had been told that numbers are your friends,  
but that algebraic concept was beyond belief.

She was downright lucky since few kids patronized  
the Go Fishing booth. She hid behind the sea-blue curtain  
to calculate how much grace she'd return to each fishing buddy.  
Kids would toss their fishing line over the top  
and Chlora would pretend to be a big fish in the wavy ocean,  
tug on the line, and hook something onto it.

Her first customer was a hillbilly girl with blacked out teeth,  
and wired braids that stuck straight out. She was a poster child  
for that dentist who gave out toothbrushes for treats.  
She surely needed no more candy, so Chlora tied on a rock.  
The hillbilly cried out loud, and back behind the curtain  
Chlora took pity, gave her another turn,  
and the kid landed herself some Certs. \*

After a few more rocks, thorns and trodden paths,  
Chlora realized the juxtaposition of sowing and fishing  
wasn't working very well, even though she typically  
could make an analogy out of any two things.  
But that was OK since she didn't want to attract any more business. \*  
She quietly squatted on the philosopher's stone \*  
and examined the playground dirt behind the booth. \*  
It was old dirt, and flat worn out, \*  
the kind of devil's playground dirt that nothing would grow in, \*  
packed down hard from years of soccer, \*  
Red Rover, and girls chasing boys. \*  
Sown seeds wouldn't have a chance there. \*

She decided to give her calculator a workout.  
She punched in numbers and every other weird symbol  
till the paper tape began spinning out of control,  
printing its crazy head off with figures and figures,  
little naked figures doing nasty things  
but looking quite nonchalant about it all.  
They multiplied as she continued to tap on the keys  
and tear off the strips of paper.  
They looked like Halloween itself,

a puzzle between good and evil, with a lot of play in the middle.



**Calculating Grace**

Calculator: 3 ½" x 9 ½" x 4 ½"

Puzzle: 21" x 11"

2007, glazed porcelain with gold and white gold, in 11 parts

It began to resemble that Bosch triptych she'd studied with  
a magnifying glass in her art book.

\*

No way around it; that old painting was bizarre.

Nothing in the modern art section of the book even came close  
except maybe Dali or Magritte, and they just tried too hard.

\*\*

The strips of paper began to look like a Where's Waldo illustration.

\*

If God is in the details, just where was he here?

There was Jesus, marrying Adam and Eve  
who came to their wedding buck naked.

\*

Was Jesus really around back then and did he approve of this?



Creation of Adam & Eve, from Garden of Earthly Delights, Left panel

Chlora was interrupted by a little Indian chief beating his tom tom outside the booth. He was whining to go fishing.

Chlora hopped up and told him they just ran out of fish here because Jesus' disciples had just miraculously caught them all in a net so he should go catch one with his own two hands like Hiawatha.

She pointed him to the tub where they dunk for apples, which in her opinion was about as much fun as water boarding.

What a thorny kid. She went back to her calculator.

\*  
\*  
\*

The next strips the calculator cranked out gave proof that God can't control his creation.

It appeared to be a morality tale in a pleasure garden with a delightful multiplying effect,

as one unearthly little figure lead to a dozen more.  
Division sometimes multiplied too,  
like when Grandmother dug up iris bulbs  
to separate them and them replanted them to get more.  
Mother Nature's hocus pocus math was mysterious, unlike arithmetic.

She had read that Bosch was probably into alchemy, \*  
practiced by amateur chemists who tried to imitate creation back then.  
She had a chemistry set at home and wanted to try this,  
but the alchemists' directions were impossible to read, \*  
all this gibberish about the subtle body, \*  
with matter and soul in transition.  
Those medieval alchemists were trickier than  
the magicians at the carnival,  
in their magic hats, stirring up concoctions of who knows what.

[Need photo](#)

[Dudley's Magic Hat](#)

4 3/4" x 8 1/8" 9 1/2"

1991, glazed porcelain

Collection of Dr. Dudley Youman, Austin, TX)

Chlora punched more buttons and the paper tape flowed.  
The calculator did more abracadabra, like that  
 $a+b=c$  algebraic biz, like in John 3:16. \*  
She'd been forced to memorize God so loved the world  
that He gave his only Son that whosoever believeth in him  
would not perish but have eternal life,  
but nobody could explain that verse  
any better than they could explain alchemy.  
Both seemed to have some odd theological chemistry  
that aimed to reconcile opposites.

Bosch kept churning out of the calculator.  
On close inspection, he somehow  
made all that sex stuff look playful.  
The alchemists said to put such things in a crock pot \*  
and let them stew in their juices before you turn up the heat.  
Then you put on a lid till it all burns up and transforms into gold.  
Those alchemists should've met the goose that laid the golden eggs. \*  
It'd been a lot less trouble, and wouldn't stink like rotten eggs.

The calculator spit out two final strips,  
different and darker than the others.  
All together it made a triptych and the right wing was Hell itself.



Detail of Hell section from [Garden of Earthly Delights](#)

The Devil was on his life guard's chair pooping out people  
and crucifying them on harps dropped by fallen angels.  
A giant ear was being hacked with a butcher knife,

\*

no doubt a temptation for poor Vincent Van Gogh.  
Chlora had been worried about his ear for a long time now,  
and every time she got an ear infection she saw sunflowers.  
Was that one stuck in somebody's rear end?  
Sunflowers would brighten up this dark, smelly place,  
which she figured was nothing but a big septic tank,  
cleaned out by Jesus in the harrowing of hell every now and then.  
Like a giant sponge, he absorbs the muck in the world  
and deposits it down there for good.

\*photo

\*



### [Calculating Grace](#)

Detail of adaptation of Bosch's [Garden of Earthly Delights](#)

Bosch's Hell was quite populated,  
but Chlora's wildest imaginings could not picture  
a loving God putting his beloveds in such a cesspool,  
no matter what they did. Perhaps the alchemists  
took a clue from the Old Testament's refining fires,  
and people just got cleaned up in hell until they were fit  
for polite company.

\*

The calculator quit clicking. Had she run out of grace?  
Grace is supposed to be inexhaustible, so maybe this was just  
how it was supposed to be, nine strips of paper.  
Chlora lined them up and The Garden of Earthly Delights  
came into focus. The transformation was ambiguous,

but then that's how a lot of good things are.  
The calculator spit out one last piece of paper,  
blank and fresh.  
She didn't tear it off but let it just curl up.  
The words GO FIGURE materialized,  
and that was surely a sign to continue her quest, whatever it was.  
For the life of her she couldn't figure it out,  
but then certitude is overrated.



[Calculating Grace](#)

Detail of *GO FIGURE*

Finally Chlora's volunteering assignment was over.  
She collected the leftover candy.  
She jammed the calculator back into its Naugahide case  
and stuffed all the paper strips around it. \*  
They got stuck in the zipper; little figures  
were hanging out all over, like an ad for Planned Parenthood. \*  
The world just couldn't take care of them all.  
She emptied the paper strips into her burlap bag and headed  
for the big kids' carnival, now starting up.



Detail of vinyl calculator case,  
With exterior of Bosch's triptych showing the creation of the world

*.....later, Chlora has discovered that her kitten Geneva has been killed...*

This is always the real problem with pets: they die.  
Chlora had reality fatigue.  
Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord. \*  
Then, get with it, and let me know if you need any help.

While potential murder schemes flicked through her mind,  
Chlora took the calculator out of her burlap bag  
and unzipped the case.  
The vinyl case would be a good fit for a small kitten. \*  
And supposedly the naugahide was waterproof.  
Geneva was stiff, but her fur was now dry and soft.  
She looked sweet, not as dead as a dead bird looks.  
Chlora wrapped Geneva in the strips of paper from the calculator.  
She plucked some rosebuds from  
the trellis nearby and put them in between Geneva's paws.  
She kissed the small mummy bundle \*  
and zipped her up. A New World was on the case,  
hopefully better than this one.  
She twisted a rambling rose cane around the brim

of her hat, pricking her finger.



[Hat from Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume](#)

Hat: 5" x 13 ½" x 12 ½"

Then she held all the hurts up to her heart.  
Chlora considered going through all the stages of grief,  
but would have to skip over the state of denial.

\*

Tomorrow the neighbor kids would put their heads together  
and come up with some liturgy for a dead cat.  
It would begin with something stupidly premature like  
let the healing begin.

\*

Then they'd perform the funeral.  
They'd had several before of course—  
baby birds that'd fallen out of the nest,  
and recently the newborn baby rabbit Bonnie,

\*

who'd gotten a full color-guard salute.  
They gave that rabbit a proper Christian burial  
but just in case tucked in a few things it might need in its afterlife,  
according to the Pharaohs.

\*

But then rabbits really don't need much.  
Kittens don't either.

Bonnie was smaller than Geneva, and they salted her down  
and mummified her in strips of cloth and made an

esophagus out of two plastic banana split holders.  
That was wrapped in foil and put it in a shoebox  
inside a styrofoam cooler. Each layer got sprayed with Lysol  
to sanitize the death. Then they painted Egyptian symbols  
of the afterlife over the whole thing.

\*  
\*



**The Lord, Lysol and Lazarus**

Adaptation of Duccio's Raising of Lazarus  
with lid on: approx. 8" x 3" diameter  
1995, glazed porcelain with platinum and gold  
(Private Collection, Dallas, TX)

*add photo of other side of Lysol*

In three more years, they'd dig up Bonnie  
to see if mummification worked.  
She did not want to do this with Geneva,  
but she knew they might need Lysol by morning,  
because she had heard the story of the Raising of Lazarus,  
the one where Jesus cried  
and everybody else held their nose, *P.U.!*,  
because Lazarus stunk to high heaven.

\*

In lieu of flowers she would bring plenty of Kleenex,  
a nice full box, pink in honor of the kitten.  
and they'd offer plenty of Bless You's,

\*

like fresheners aimed at smells.

As the kitten's surrogate mother, she would get front seat at the funeral where everyone would watch her for fear she'd faint into the hole.

Then she would drop a perfect red leaf into the grave and into each place where the kitten had played and slept.



**Kleenex Says "Bless You"**

pink: 6 3/4" x 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"

blue: 5 1/2" x 5 1/8" x 9 3/8"

1995, glazed porcelain

Geneva had indeed been a blessing.

Poor Bonnie died before Chlora even got to know her.

Why must we lose what we have

in order to know how much we loved it?

Isn't there some sort of short cut for love and death?

Chlora felt that Geneva deserved a sarcophagus as well as a casket. This would add more beauty to the pain.

She put the calculator case with Geneva inside it

down into the elaborately carved jack-o-lantern

and fit the crooked pumpkin lid into place.

It would quickly rot and help Geneva go back to nature.



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