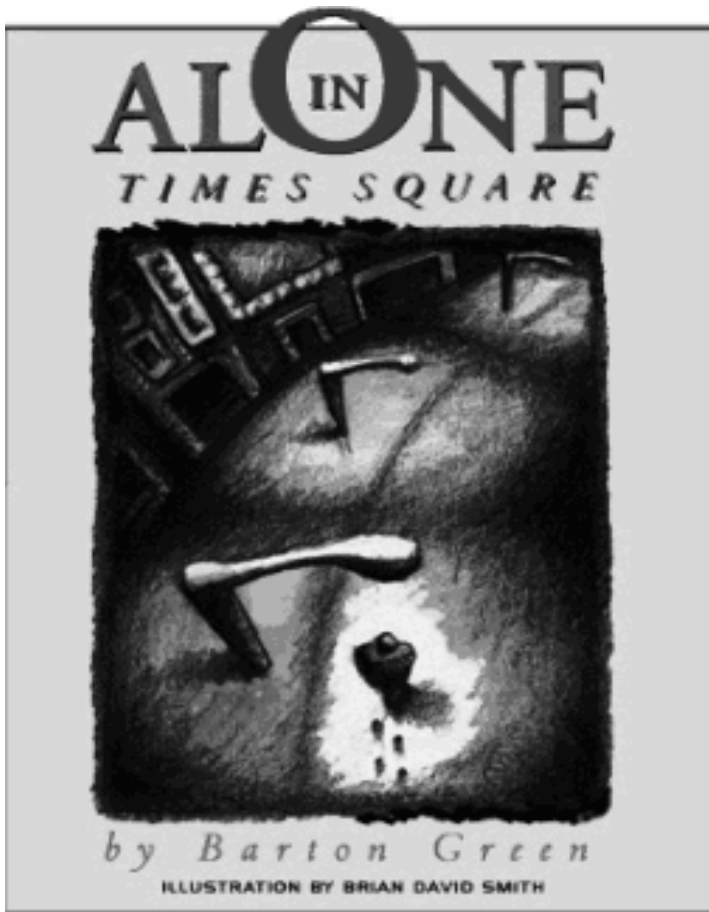

Alone
In Times Square

by
Barton Green

The first short story ever
to appear in the pages
of the
Contemporary Music Staple

CCM Magazine
November, 1994



It was eerie, like I had stepped into a lost episode of the Twilight Zone; but Rod Serling was no where in sight -- and neither was anyone else. It was 2:30 AM and I was standing in the middle of New York's famous Times Square, absolutely alone. There was not another living soul along the snow-covered streets that intersected Broadway. The only signs of life in that usually lively square were the flashing neon billboards -and me. Never before had I pictured a sight so vacant, surreal. It was so quiet I could almost hear the snowflakes hit the ground. And in that silence, my mind began to replay the opening lines of a haunting song:

**How fragile how frail /
What a picture perfect place in time
I recall it so well in my mind /
Went for a walk in the snow**

In that instant I was drawn across the threshold of an unforgettable experience. It was the beginning of an episode that would inevitably alter a lifetime of logic. Before the morning sun rose again, I would see everything - differently.

This still life framed in white was not the product of imagination, but rather the results of the worst blizzard to hit Manhattan in decades. No doubt New York residents will long remember the crippling storm of February 8, '99. I know I will. That was the day we both blew into town unexpectedly.

Out of nowhere I had been invited to meet with three of the Big Apple's most prestigious publishing firms. For a writer such opportunities come around about as often as Halley's Comet, so naturally I dropped everything, jumped into my drafty jeep and made tracks for The City.

The freak snowstorm arrived first; escorted by the odd winter occurrences of lightening and thunder. And about that same time, as I entered the outer boundary of the blizzard, my jeep's heater decided to quit! For the next two freezing hours all I had

to keep me warm was my trusty Walkman, pre-loaded with one of the few cassettes I brought along; *Cindy Morgan's "A Reason To Live"*...

**Life's always changing /
But never asking
if change is all right with you...(**)**

Pulling the collar of my jacket around my neck, I had to agree; "*Sing it, Cindy!*"

Sixty frostbitten miles later, I shivered my way into a Times Square hotel, toting my sparse overnight bag and my equally light windbreaker. (note: Next time opportunity knocks, be prepared ---pack a parka.)

From my hotel window I could look directly down onto Times Square. From that lofty perch "The Great White Way" seemed the only description that fit. The heavy clouds filtered the rays of the setting sun and casted a cold gray haze over the scene. Everything was covered with snow; from the hoods of impatient taxis to the umbrella tops of scurrying pedestrians. They all seemed desperate to get home before frigid nightfall set in.

I, too felt a sense of apprehension. Like the people below me, I also wanted to get out of town -fast! Coming back to New York was hard for me. The place held too many memories. "*Was this the eve of my big break? Or the winter of my discontent?*" In my heart I hoped my elevated view was a sign that tomorrow's meetings would get things off the ground... (That's when the sneezing started).

Six hours, a pot of hot tea, and a battery-drained Walkman later, I was none the better; if anything -worse. We men never know what to do when we get a cold: When we're kids we depend on SuperMom. In adolescence, we're revived by the sympathy of our girlfriends. And as men, we savor every second of attention from our wives. But at the moment I was neither a child, an adolescent, or a husband - I was just alone with my stuffy nose, trying to quiet my Manhattan memories with the tunes of Cindy Morgan, and Susan Ashton. That night their God-centered music were the lullabies that calmed this man's anxiety;

**So when you break/ So when you fall/
Can't find the strength to care at all
If you'll reach out to Him/ He'll be reaching in (**)**

**The love that use to hold our hearts/
Wants to take us beyond justice to mercy (#)**

Around 2:15AM I was awakened from my fitful sleep by a throbbing head that had transformed into a cotton-stuffed carnival balloon. It was obvious that I had to do something. So in between sneezes, I dialed the front desk and asked, "Does the city that never sleeps have an all-night pharmacy close by?"

And to my surprise, "...Yeah over 08th, between 46th and 47th street." Relief was just a short half-a-block walk from the hotel.

Bundling up, I stepped out the front lobby doors --and was immediately attacked by a wall of wind straight from the North Pole! As its fury subsided and my clinched eyes reopened, I saw it! There in front of me, under a fresh layer of virgin snow was Times Square - *abandoned*. It looked like a movie set dressed for one of those cliché "end-of-the-world" scenes. Mesmerized, I lifted my tennies out of the calf-deep snow, and took a step forward. Then another. The only sound was the snow crunching underneath my shoes. Over the years, literally millions of feet have trampled across that famous square. But on this strange night the only footsteps visible in the snow was the meandering line that led from the hotel to my heels. I was alone.

**I see him there/ Under a starlit sky
And if moonlight were magic /
He'd wander back in time (*)**

Cindy's words still echoed in my head. Maybe it was because she reminded me that my life had indeed changed without permission. Or was it because I was standing on the very spot where my best memories had taken place? Though I tried to shake the feeling, Morgan's words were as persistent as the cold; part of me really did want to go back in time - back before everything fell a part.

Glancing up at the morning headlines on the Daily News Building's wrap-around display, it was clear that the world was constantly making mistakes. Still, I couldn't help but feel alone in my misery.

**Sometimes the wrong way / Seems much like the right way
Are we wise when its our time to choose?**

. We humans always think we know what to do when we make mistakes. As children, we cry and point a little finger at our siblings. As adolescents, we run away. And if caught, we place the blame on our friends. As adults, we yell at each other, divide up our belongings and leave the responsibility at each other's feet. It's only after the fact, sometimes long after, when we realize what we should have done.

Recalling that I had once been a child, an adolescent and a husband --Yes! I wanted to go back in time! Closing my eyes, I let Susan sing my thoughts...

**I know we don't see eye to eye
We've let angry hearts flare and the bitter words fly
The common ground we used to share Is harder to find
But I believe that it's still there (#)**

Our "common ground" surrounded me. Off to my right was the video arcade where we took our wedding announcement photo. And just above there, were the windows of the office where she now spends her days. Behind me was the restaurant where we celebrated many of my brother's Broadway performances. And just down the street was the park where we first met. "*If moonlight were magic,*" I whispered, "*what I wouldn't give to see her face.*" But then another chorus of reality surfaced ...

**You can turn back to all the memories/
But you can't turn back the clock
You can make life all it can be/
But you can't make it something it's not
Yesterday is yesterday
and tomorrow is still a day away
So what do you say / There's a reason to live today (*)**

"What reason!?" I wondered aloud, certain that no one was listening. "Why should I care about tomorrow? Sure, the meetings I have in the morning could boost my career. But what does it matter anymore? Look at me! I'm ALONE -- in of all places, Times Square!"

As my frustrated voice bounced off the surrounding buildings, an incredible notion struck me. *"Wait a second ... Times Square!"* My mind began to race, snapping the pieces of a puzzle together. *"This is the place where one year ends and another begins!"*

Will we change or just regret / Remember more than we forget

"This is the very spot where people come to say good-bye to the past and... greet the future."

How grand it would be to go back / But life doesn't work that way.

"It's the one place in all the world where people gather each year to -- START OVER!"

In that illuminating instant my thawing senses reminded me that I was standing in the world's busiest Square - the intersection of Time, itself. And that just above me, someone was indeed listening; The One Who created Time. When did I forget He was there? Mary and I had once looked to Him for everything.

Suddenly I understood that I couldn't go back and cut out the knot of mistakes we made, but something told me that I could start over again, and let God unravel it for me.

**The love that I've chosen / Cries out to be spoken /
Leaving the heartache behind/
We must reach out beyond justice to mercy/
Going more than halfway to forgive**

That February night, I made a brand new start of it in ol' New York. Standing in the middle of Times Square, I decided to celebrate my own, personal, New Year. There wasn't a quarter of a million people pressed together, tooting party horns. It was just me, the snow, and the Inventor of Time. The resolutions I made there were earnest. And they were as profound and pure as Susan Ashton's voice...

**Throw Your arms around me and walk me home
I've wandered off way too far / for way too long
Standing broken in this wilderness of shame
I have found my only strength is in Your name
Oh Father please can you undo what I've done
Bring me back to square one ++**

That evening I learned that life's blizzards may arrive unexpectedly, but it's up to us how long the winter lasts. Time is a gift from God; we can either wear it like a heart on our sleeve, or like a tool, on our wrist. Our choices create our chances. I also realized that my earlier, elevated view had not been a fluke; it was just the preview of an unforgettable episode that changed everything - including me.

Maybe it was the cold night air, but my stuffy head wasn't throbbing anymore. So turning back to the hotel, I retraced my steps "feeling better" about tomorrow. As the snow crunched underneath my tennies, I offered a whispered 'thank-you' to Cindy and Susan for their insights.... Whether the tunes are new releases, or familiar classics; the God-centered music of such artists definitely have a place in this mistake-filled world -- especially on those occasions when we feel alone... in Times Square.

***A Reason To Live** words & music by Cindy Morgan

**** Reaching In** words & music by Cindy Morgan

Beyond Justice To Mercy by Susan Ashton, Billy Smiley & Paula Carpenter

++ Summer Solstice by Wayne Kirkpatrick