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The Good Book

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THE GOOD BOOK

By: Sarah Lyall

#1

The Father paused for a moment. As he looked down to examine his hand, he found a dot of blood on his hand. There was a paper cut hidden deep within the line of his palm. It was nearly invisible to the eye, but that didn't make it any less real. He wondered when it had happened. He had had many paper cuts over the course of his lifetime, but he hadn't felt the sharp sting he always felt when he accidentally cut himself on his Bible. But this wasn't like the other times. This was from no Bible. No. In fact, it was just the opposite.

He swore under his breath, slamming the door behind him as he exited the brick parsonage. It was a quiet night, making the thud from the door all the more present. The Father looked up towards the heavens. The clouds were made of dark swirling masses, which lit up with a quick burst of lightning. He furrowed his brow. A storm was raging in the distance, making itself closer and closer in each passing moment. The Father quickened his step, making his way to the church lying across the street.

As the Father stepped into the church, a serene moment of peace washed over him, much like returning home after a long day. But this moment was fleeting, once he remembered why he was there. He made his way through the empty church in the dark, each step echoing as he walked towards his office. It was a small office, but it had served him well. It was here he wrote his best sermons, where he provided the best advice for his congregation. When asked why he was so adamant about his office, he'd said that it was here that he felt closest to God. Along the wall were two bookcases, full of texts he had accumulated over his twenty-some years of service to the church. He eyed the books, trying to figure out which to read. Which book could help him?

There were Bibles of various kinds, a Torah, numerous books about grief and counseling, even books dating back before his time spent at seminary. After a moment, he finally reached, picking up a worn-out King's James Bible, with a broken spine, far older than any of the

The Good Book

rest of the books in his office. This book had seen him through thick and thin. Surely, he thought, it'd have the answers he needed. He took the Bible and sat down at his desk, where he began to frantically flip the pages, nearly tearing them as he searched Leviticus, then Acts, before stopping on Deuteronomy:

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

The Father grumbled to himself, dropping the book onto his desk as he stood up. A rumble of thunder could be heard in the distance. He returned to the bookshelf, this time choosing a New International Version. Then an English Standard, followed by a New Living Translation. Soon, his arms were full of Bibles which he piled on top of his desk. One by one, he began to read the different versions of this same passage, increasingly becoming more and more frustrated. While the words varied from version to version, it was only slightly, not enough to provide any relief to him. It gave him no answers.

Before the Father had finished reading the mountain of Bibles sat upon his desk, he stopped, taking a moment to look at the photograph on his desk of his son. The picture was nearly a year old, taken at his son's birthday party. His eyes stared at the Father, with a smile spread across his face. How different that face had seemed only moments ago.

He reached over, toppling the books onto the floor with the swift movement of his hand. When the oldest Bible landed, it split in two, but the Father didn't notice. He had closed his eyes, lifting his hands to his face. Beneath the sound of the raging storm, he could hear the sound of his own heartbeat, thumping rapidly in his ear. Tears began to trickle down his face. How could God do this to him? How could he turn his boy into a Satanist, with no words of advice to help save him?

You lie under the covers of your bed, with a pillow covering your head. You're convinced that if you just wake up, it can all go away. That's right, you tell yourself. This is just a bad dream. That way everything would be okay. Your dad wouldn't be upset with you. You'd still have the book. And everything would be okay again.

The front door thuds shut, shaking the window besides your bed. You peek your head up from the covers to look outside. Your father is outside, storming across the street to the church as a flash of lightning occurs in the distance. If he were to look back, he'd be able to see your face, pushed against the glass of your second story window. But he doesn't look. You really must have made him mad, for him to be going over there this late at night.

You sit up from your bed, wiping the dried snot off onto the sleeve of your t-shirt. You wonder how much time you have until he comes back home again. If you were to sneak downstairs, would he notice? You're already in trouble, how much worse could it get?

The wooden floor of the parsonage feels cold on your bare feet as you creep down the hallway. You barely weigh a hundred pounds, but the floor creaks underneath the weight of your body outside your parent's bedroom door. Your mother's in there, sick with a cold. If she hadn't almost overdosed on Nyquil, she'd have heard the fight. You slip past the bedroom, and hurry down the stairs to the kitchen.

The trashcan sits in the corner of the kitchen. You'd turn the overhead light on, but if you did, there's a chance he'd be able to see you from the church right now. So, you stumble in the dark over to the drawer, searching for the flashlight your mom keeps stashed there in case of emergencies. You find it at the back of the drawer, along with some clear tape. You turn on the flashlight, keeping the light pointed at the floor. There's still bits of paper on the tile floor that he had missed. You walk over to trashcan, placing the flashlight on the floor so you can take off the swiveling silver top. On top of the trash lies the remaining part of your book.

You never meant to upset your father. You were just curious. All the kids at school were reading these stories. You wanted to know what they were like. What you were missing out on. Maybe have a chance to fit in for a change. You didn't expect to like it.

As you pick up the flashlight, you can see part of the cover sticking out. You reach in,

The Good Book

picking up a part that says “ter he Stone.” You rifle through the papers until you find the other half. You lay the two pieces together on the floor, aligning them as best as you can. After taping the two halves together, it finally reads Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone again.

Your father never liked these kinds of books. But why? What was wrong with them? You didn’t think they were bad. They were just pretend. You were ten years old, even you knew that what happened in books wasn’t true, so why couldn’t he? You weren’t allowed to believe in magic, which always made you think your father was a hypocrite. Every Sunday, he would stand at the front of church, going on and on about people that you were sure didn’t exist. How could they be? The type of things he preached about from the Bible never seemed to happen in real life, or at least as far as you could tell. It couldn’t be real, could it? They were just characters in a story someone had made up a long time ago. Oh, you would have loved for them to be real, but in your heart, you could never force yourself to believe in any of the things your father had said. Why was he allowed to believe in a certain kind of magic and you weren’t?

You continued going through the garbage, trying your best to piece the book back together. Some bits of the story were gone, having been ripped to shreds and unrecognizable. Other parts were covered in bits of spaghetti sauce and noodles tossed away after tonight’s dinner, making the pages slimy and stick together. Every once in a while, you’d look out the window, catching a flash of lightning from the storm as you’d check to make sure your father was still at the church. The lightning would remind you of Harry’s scar. You wonder how bad it hurt, if it felt anything like watching the book being torn apart, watching as the closest thing to a friend you had was being destroyed right in front of you. No matter how hard you’d tried, you wouldn’t be able to completely save the book, but you did what you could, taping up ripped pages and cleaning off garbage with a paper towel. It wasn’t perfect, but it was still a good book.

Sarah Lyall is a senior English major with an emphasis in creative writing and a minor in Women’s Studies. She is from State Center, Iowa, and transferred from Marshalltown Community College with her associate’s degree. When she’s not up until 3 AM writing and doing homework, she enjoys cats, crochet, and photography. Someday, she hopes to become a published novelist, as well as get a full night of sleep.