

Water from the Well

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The pastor's voice sprawls out over the congregation. I feel trapped. Heat circulates through the room, sealed vents. The choir hum, and that is when we all realize God is present at Bethlehem Baptist Church. I'm sat in the Lord's presence awaiting my baptism into his grace, and the only thing running through my sinful mind is the realization that I'm going to piss myself.

The church service begins with our flamboyant choir director waving his arms around in jovial praise. His long braids fling as wildly as he does to the upbeat tempo of gospel.

Our church mother, Sister Barker, overwhelmed by the spirit, lifts her hands to the sky, swaying in solidarity.

The church organist keys long dull strokes on his electric keyboard, which causes a woman in the front row to faint five times in two minutes. I can only shut my eyes at these random acts of exertion and divert my attention to prayer.

My father, not much for service, pretends to thumb through his bible while staring daggers into the back of my head. My mother braces in her seat from sheer anticipation of the event. The crowded four walls of Bethlehem Baptist are to capacity. The purple hue lights up around an oval pool embedded into the stage, covered in fine wood finish. It calls to me.

My feet jitter in my seat a few feet from the pulpit. I sit in a circle of elderly worshippers. They bow their heads to the divine ferocity of the pastor's words blowing from off the Book of John and mere inches away from the sinners, the unclean, my family. I can hear the

orchestra loud behind me now. My gaze stretches out at the long walk from the comfort of my obscure seat, and I uncomfortably step forward, the liquid ready to burst out.

“Heavenly father, welcome young Jaylon into your divine kingdom!” says Pastor Clark, spewing behind his podium.

God was larger than any one person, but Pastor Clark always spoke as if he and the Lord had played for the same softball team. My sinful thoughts work their way from my head to my bladder. I wince, feet jumping from side to side. I hate myself for downing a two liter of fruit punch from off the Sunday school refreshment table. It serves me right; I think. The embarrassment of stepping into adulthood while reverting to wetting myself in front of a packed house makes me want to curl up and die.

I attempt to play old movies in my head, skipping the ones where beverages were drunk, or water was mentioned. I see my cousin Cameron smirk in my direction.

“Stand up straight, stupid,” Cameron whispers, with a bible covering his mouth.

I get ushered by ushers to the tank. A white, pale bowl with a purest blue water I’ve ever seen. Decorations of purple linen adorn in crucifixes lay to the side of me. Pastor Clark enters like a giant, with small ripples of water splashing beneath him. I squirm around, hugging my thighs against my itchy corduroy pants. I can see the disdain in my father’s gaze growing from the front row, silently telling me to get my act together.

I think about all the people who stood where I was. My father, who hardly ever comes to church, walked this walk. My mother, who still recounts the moment she was saved, walked here. My grandmother, grandfather, uncles, cousins, Pastor Clark, nearly everyone I knew took

the dunk. My knees buckle under this pressure. They drape a white smock over my clothes. The lights circle above from the multicolor windowpanes which shimmer over the water.

“Come now, Jaylon,” says Pastor Clark, motioning me into the tank. The congregation behind me stands at full attention and the organ draws dead silent. I take the plunge.

“Jaylon, do you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your one and only savior?”

I look at my mother. Her face says you better. I nod.

“Jaylon, are you ready to be baptized in his grace and release yourself of the Devil’s unholy grip?”

I can feel the water wrapping around me, easing the tension. I nod and I do.

Pastor cradles my head in his arms, and then he submerges me into cool water. My body gives way to the force. I feel a warm feeling around me. I wonder how I will emerge after. I hold my breath as everything else takes its natural course. The sturdy hands of Pastor Clark hold me under for what feels like an eternity as I hear muffled words being spoken over me. I drift, reborn.

A quick jerk removes me from the water. My hair is a wet mess. Pastor Clark smiles and a thunderous applause erupts over my triumphant resurrection.

“Jaylon, son. How do you feel?” asks Pastor Clark.

I stand still and allow for the last drops to shake out into the holy water that surrounded us. I look out free of shame at the entire congregation who wait with bated breath. My eyes behold the mural of Jesus hanging above and I reply, “Relieved.”

Pastor Clark wraps his arms around me in a bear hug, chuckling heartily and says, “Well, that about sums it up.”

The pastor helps me out, and my mother runs towards me with a towel. She fusses over me. My father pats me on the shoulders and takes me to the side of the stage. Pastor Clark stands still, dripping wet before our fellow parishioners. He claps his hands together with a force that echoes throughout the church. My eyes once again find him. His lips curl into a smile and he shouts, “Who’s next?”

I am going to Hell.