

THAT FAIRY
TALE

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"How can you believe that fairy tale?" Ethan asked his father.

It was in the context of a conversation – an argument, really – about whether Ethan had to go with the family to Easter services.

"It's not always easy," his father admitted, trying hard to say the right thing.

"So why believe it? It's crazy! A crazy story made up by a bunch of weirdo cult nuts two thousand years ago!"

"I know it sounds crazy," his father began.

"If it sounds crazy, it is crazy!" Ethan broke in. "And I'm old enough now to make up my own mind about it."

That was true, Ethan's father thought. The boy was seventeen years old.

He just nodded his agreement.

"So-o-o-o ..." Ethan said.

"You still have to come with us," Ethan's father said. "It's part of being a family."

"And pretend to pray? And pretend to take communion? What kind of bullshit is that?"

"Don't pray. Don't take communion. Just sit there quietly until it's over. That's all I'm asking."

"And you think Mom is going to be satisfied with that? And you think everybody's not going to notice what I'm not doing?"

"You think your mother is going to be satisfied with your not going at all? You think no one's going to notice that you're not there?"

In the end, of course, Ethan went, and his father could feel his anger like the chill of a wind off the block of ice seated next to him.

Dear God, he prayed as the service went on. *Help him to believe. I know it's hard to believe. Please. Reach out to him and touch his heart.*

It felt so good to pray that tears came to Ethan's father's eyes, both of gratitude that such a comfort was given to him and of sorrow that his son might never know it.

Yes, it was hard to believe that God had a son. That He impregnated a real woman so that she could give birth to Him. That He purposely suffered a most horrible death so that through His suffering everyone could be cleansed of sin. That after He died, He was resurrected, was now watching over us in the form of the Holy Spirit, and would eventually return, gather up and judge the living and the dead, and end Time.

Even the constant repetition of the Credo at every mass seemed an admission that this was something awfully difficult to swallow.

Touch his heart, he prayed again, as he and the rest of the congregation (not including, of course, his son) sang the response, "Christ is born, Christ is risen, Christ will rise again." *None of this makes sense unless you feel it. Let him know You as a companion, as someone to talk to, as someone who loves him. Someone he could never give up by not believing.*

He cast a glance at Ethan, who sat staring stonily in front of him.

As promised, Ethan didn't stand when the others stood or kneel when the others knelt, but just sat there like a prisoner in shackles, waiting for his jailers to continue taking him wherever they were taking them.

Every now and then his father felt a flash of anger go through him like a stomach cramp. He felt the pitying eyes of friends and acquaintances in the congregation, and the humiliation got to him. Bastard! he thought, both cursing and disavowing his son in the same word.

Patience, he thought. *Thy will be done.*

This thought comforted him enough to enable him to turn his thoughts sporadically away from Ethan and back towards the service in front of him.

At the end of the service, as of every service, the priest greeted all of the congregants as they left the church, hugging, kissing cheeks, shaking hands, wishing everyone a blessed Easter.

He shook Ethan's father's hand, winked at him, and then, almost like a wrestler putting his opponent into a final, unbreakable hold, he grabbed Ethan in a bear hug and would not let him go.

"My little man!" he murmured. "My little man!" though Ethan towered over him, looking down at his large bald spot surrounded by a thin ring of white hair.

At first Ethan seemed simply to endure it, then he made a few attempts to push the determined priest

away, and finally he seemed to surrender as the hug went on and on and on and on, even hugging back a little as the rest of the congregation, waiting their turn to be greeted by the priest, became a kind of an oval grandstand viewing the spectacle.

Finally, the priest let Ethan go, standing back, holding both of Ethan's hands firmly in his and smiling into his eyes. Ethan smiled back, as though they had an understanding, and then the priest turned to Ethan's mother, kissed her on the cheek, and wished her a happy Easter.

That night Ethan's father came into Ethan's room to thank him for coming to church. "I realize it must have been difficult for you to be there against your beliefs and to stick out like sore thumb in front of everyone," he said.

"That's OK," Ethan said. "It wasn't so terrible."

"It took guts," his father said. "I admire you for that."

"Really, Dad. In the end it was OK. Father Blakely?"

"Yes? You didn't mind what he did?"

"He's a cool guy," Ethan said. "For someone who believes in fairy tales."

In his smile, Ethan's father sensed a door just slightly ajar, and he thanked the priest silently for showing him the way.

"Yes," he agreed. "For someone who believes in fairy tales."