
April 2015

Child of God

Jared Sebastian
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate>



Part of the Fiction Commons

Recommended Citation

Sebastian, Jared (2015) "Child of God," *The Laureate*: Vol. 14 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol14/iss1/8>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Laureate by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

Wilkes was thinking of his daughter's hair bows when his truck collided with the deer. His head smacked into the steering wheel then snapped back against his seat. His daughter died on a Sunday in the rain. There was the sparkling sound of shattering glass and a shrinking whine as the engine died down. Greasy smoke snaked out of the hood. Wilkes' vision shook and all his nerves screamed in pain. The large heaving body leaning against his windshield writhed around until it was free of the wreck, and then it loped suddenly into the trees, neck hanging at an odd angle.

Wilkes opened his complaining door and took appraisal of the situation. His truck had swerved to the side of the dirt road, piling mud around his tires. The hood of his powder blue '83 GMC Sierra was bent in a slight v and the windshield was webbed and bloodied in several places. Wilkes retrieved his Browning bolt-action from out of the back, and checked that there was a round in the breech. His left leg, from his knee down to his foot, felt as though it had been attached to him backwards, and walking in this frontwards way was pulling against its nature and so causing a great strain. His head stormed with the strength of ten of his worst hangovers rolled into one. Blood from a slash on his forehead dripped occasionally onto his nose. Wilkes slung the strap of his rifle over his right shoulder and followed the deer into the trees.

Wilkes' daughter died the way in which all young daughters die—in a shocking way that inevitably leads to the father blaming himself. Her name was Sarai, and she pictured her mother as a princess-servant who had a biological imperative to make sure everything was clean all of the time, and her father as the well-read hairy beast who at the oddest times would roar and lash out his claws. Together they lived in a dustless house off of a dirt road and lived quiet, angry, TV dinner lives. Wilkes often thought but never admitted to his wife that there are two types of parents in the world: those that say "If I had all the money in the world I would give you x and y" and those that say "I have given you x and y, now do as I say and be good." They were the former set.

One blistering afternoon, Sarai went out to play with a friend and came back two years later.

It had rained all throughout the previous night and into the early morning hours, so the ground was still churned with thick mud. The cloven tracks of the deer leading away from the crash were prominent. Wilkes could tell by their distances that the deer had an odd gait most likely due to injury. Possibly a leg was twisted or snapped. Wilkes thought how these creatures had an amazing resilience and stamina. That, coupled with the adrenaline-filled panic surging in the deer's bosom,

drove it away to what it saw as safety. Maybe it foresaw its end and simply wished for a peaceful place to lie. Or perhaps it searched for a water source.

The tracks followed the downward slope of the land, and Wilkes thought he remembered that there was a large pond in this area, at the bottom of the valley. Hunters would come and gather round, for the wildlife oft visited the pool. But more and more, they were learning the error of their ways. First the deer, when they witnessed their ilk dying off, and then Wilkes and his fellow hunters, when the deer changed water sources. Spots of blood were brushed against dead leaves and bark. The animal was struggling, had struggled. Wilkes felt in himself a strange pity. But it was hard to have pity for something so noble. Intermittently he wiped away blood droplets that fell from his forehead and onto his nose.

Eventually the cakey mud was replaced with clumps of wild grass and underbrush. The tracking grew more subtle. Padded down weeds. Clumps of mud thrown up. Wilkes had even learned to pick up on the lingering metallic smell of blood in the air. He walked softly, closed his eyes, and felt for the deer. Felt its fear, its instinct, the rapid inhaling of its lungs. The hill grew steeper, until it cut off at a short ridge where the earth had been ground away and roots from the old trees nearby poked out in intervals.

Sarai's mother Emily went down the street to collect Sarai for dinner, and that was when she was told that Sarai had already left her friend and headed for home. In a few hours they had gathered a neighborhood-wide search party, consisting mostly of kids. Wilkes informed the police. Slowly the iceberg of truth settled into his chest. His daughter was missing. His daughter was gone. A week passed by. They found her shoe on the side of a major road. Then a month passed. Emily did not sleep, and was forced to take pills. Wilkes found himself unable to fully embrace the situation as reality. One brisk winter morning he went out hunting and shot himself a ten-point buck. He sawed off its antlers, then its ears with his Swiss army knife. He yanked out its eyes. He gouged its belly and strung out the yards and yards of intestines. He stomped on all the organs. He lay there in that pile of warm blood and guts and slept. His wife was frightened when he came home. He took a shower.

On Christmas Eve of that year they received a letter with no return address. It had been written on a typewriter. On it were five words, a thin black shadow in a sea of white: "She is my daughter now." First they did not make love. Then they fought. Emily sent him divorce papers late that summer. Wilkes grew inside himself like a cyst and tried to live a simulated life. He could not tear himself from his home because, he said, when Sarai comes back this will be the first place she goes.

Two years, three months, and six days after she had disappeared, Wilkes woke one morning to see his daughter now two years older curled in a ball on his doorstep, soaked with dew. She breathed shallowly and did not respond to his touch. He called her mother on the way to the hospital. A balloon of hope rose in Wilkes now that his daughter was physically in reach.

When the gravest doctor the hospital had to offer came to see them in the waiting room Wilkes did not listen to him as he spoke of the various ailments Sarai suffered from, nor when he explained the cocktail of drugs that she had been injected with. He simply asked “is she okay, is she okay?” He did not hear the doctor say that she was dead. He just kept asking is she okay, is she okay, is she okay. He saw the words in his head, felt their numbness on his lips.

The deer lay at the bottom of the incline, spine half-wrapped around the trunk of the tree. On its flank the coat was a darker brown where the truck had carved against it. In its rapid flight the deer had been unable to stop its fall. From what Wilkes could see, at least both of its rear legs had been shattered. The deer still breathed shallowly.

For a moment Wilkes thought that he could just leave the animal to die now, but then he fought against that thought. Its eyes were writhing. It suffered slowly the labor pains of death. Wilkes found a more gradual path around the ridge, and came finally upon his quarry.

She lay there patiently, her only sound the rapid pantings. Her chest seized. Each time it ballooned Wilkes could see the hills of her ribs. She watched him. She seemed so massive, so much bigger than Wilkes and what he had thought of her. He knelt down beside the deer and ran his fingers gently through her rough fur along her back. She watched him.

I know, I know, he said. You wish for this to be finished. I am here. I have come.

The deer was silent. She studied him. A long spout of blood ran from his forehead down along his nose and falling off the sides, taking the path normally set aside for tears, coming then to the corners of his mouth. He tasted it, and was content. He felt that he was awake, and that the world that had so long now rejected him had thrown back the shroud, revealing its autumn power and firmness.

Wilkes stood, wiped his face off on his sleeve, and unslung the rifle. Cradled it tightly in his armpit and lowered the barrel towards the animal’s skull. Still she watched him. He breathed deeply and let it out. Breathed deeply and let it out. Slipped his finger around the trigger, feeling it underneath the padding of his index finger. The sky was a shield of gray. The large pond lay there at the bottom of

the valley as he suspected, and between the trees he made out the form of a naked woman standing in its shallow murk. He zoomed the scope of his rifle to close in on her, and saw that indeed she had tossed aside her clothes and was making her way into the water. Her breasts were large, pointed things, and her distended belly hung like a boulder. She was pregnant.

A short shockwave blew through Wilkes, and in the backs of his eyes he saw yellow. The deer had kicked the ground in one last pathetic effort to flee for her wretched life. It was then that Wilkes realized he just fired his rifle.

He ran, practically hovering, down the hill.

Shit, he said. Shit, shit, shit. Shit shit shit shit shit shitshit. Oh Lord. Oh shit.

The ground seemed to move backwards underneath him, as panic knifed through his chest, until finally he came upon the woman’s body emitting a ghostly light beneath the black water. He ripped off his fleece jacket and managed to kick off one shoe before wading in. He slipped an arm underneath each of her armpits and pulled. He was surprised at the weight, but then he remembered the bulging stomach, and he moved even faster. Wilkes lay her out on the gravelly sand. The woman was alive, and she was slipping into shock.

He felt her pulse. It was barely there, and widely separated. Her lips trembled, a small moan echoed from the cave of her throat.

Why? she said.

The bullet had entered her left breast and exited through her ribs. The blood flowed thickly from her side and pooled around her neck. The woman was pale as a sheet and couldn’t stop shivering. Wilkes was at a loss. He placed a hand on both wounds and applied pressure. The blood merely shot through his fingers like a spring.

You shot me. Why? she asked.

It was an accident. Do you have a cell phone?

Wilkes had nothing but a landline back at the house.

No. It was the first thing I destroyed.

Dammit. It was an accident, miss, I promise you. I was looking at you through the trees and—and somehow the gun fired. I fired the gun.

Feeling helpless, Wilkes slid his fleece jacket around her, lifting her up gingerly to get it around her back. Her hair was wet and snakelike, the color of dark seaweed. Wilkes lifted her up in his arms and his spine lit up with pain.

I’m going to take you to my truck, Wilkes said. You’re going to be okay. What’s your name, miss?

Cassandra. I don’t want to be okay.

What do you mean? You're not well.

I came here to die.

Wilkes did not know how to answer that. He began the march up the hill. His arms were already beginning to shake, but he tensed his muscles.

You have a child, Cassandra. You have to survive for your child.

I'm not going to live. I can feel the life leaving me.

You will live. You'll be okay.

No I won't. I'm going to die. You have to prepare yourself for that inevitability. I am going to die at your hands.

The blood on Wilkes' forehead and nose had coagulated and dried. He could feel the flakes. He was chilled and sweating all over.

How do I know you're not some serial rapist murderer?

Why would I kill you before trying to rape you?

You could be taking me back to your truck to suture my wounds and inject me with a drug that paralyzes me while leaving me conscious to suffer.

I'm not a rapist or a murderer, miss. I'm trying to save you.

The wet ground slid beneath him, but he kept moving. Wilkes thought of the possibilities and watched them all dwindle down to one in his mind. He thought of the reverberations, the lies he could tell, but then realized that there were no lies to save him. The child waited patiently in its mother's womb. The child waited to be delivered. Wilkes wondered if the child could be saved if not the mother.

Cassandra's eyes rolled back and her lips began moving wildly. Spit gathered in the corners of her mouth and her brows furrowed as she was gripped in pain. Her breathing rapidly increased.

Cassandra, Wilkes shouted. Cassandra, please hold on. Talk to me. Talk to me.

She was silent, but then she said hoarsely, Damn you. Damn you to hell. Hell's gonna swallow you. Swallow you whole for this.

That's right, Cassandra. Keep talking.

Damn you, I'm in so much pain. It was going to be so easy. But you took it away.

What did I take away?

My death. You took my dying out of my hands. You shot me, and you took the sin away.

Cassandra, now—

I was going to kill myself. I went down there to kill myself.

Why would you do that? Think about your child, dammit. Think about that life.

Because I am pregnant with God's child. He left me with this child in here

that I did not want.

A knot of revulsion and nausea was tied and loosed in Wilkes' belly. His knees wanted to give but he did not let them. They were near the ridge where the deer fell.

That ain't God's child.

Yes. It is.

No it is not. You're talking crazy because you are not well, and you want to place the blame on something else.

But it is you who shot me. You shot me and took the sin.

What?

You shot me and took the sin. Now the sin is on you, as it was on Cain. I wanted the sin but you took it.

Miss.

Wilkes wanted to speak because he believed it kept her alive but he found it hard. His mouth seemed cottony, and he knew eventually his body would stop working. It was only a matter of how long.

Why? Wilkes said. Why not wait at least until you had the child and could give it away?

Because it is God's child. Every child is God's until it leaves its mother. Then it becomes the Devil's. I was trying to save the child and ending my own suffering all at once.

The woman groaned some more. Her skin tone fluctuated from white to green to almost translucent. They passed the ridge and Wilkes could see his truck.

She said through short breaths, Heaven is a waiting womb, warm and silent. It is a rebirth.

Then the woman vomited onto her own face, some getting on Wilkes' shirt and neck. A thin trail of it ran from her mouth streaming down across his arm. Wilkes lost control and they both collapsed into the dry leaves. He spat and then vomited, as he crouched on all fours. His back arched, and the venomous bile scorched his throat and his nose. His limbs fell in on themselves, and for a heavenly moment he was motionless. Then Cassandra whispered something, and he got back on his knees. He picked Cassandra up as softly as he could and cradled her again in his arms.

Leave me, she whispered.

No, Wilkes shot back.

Leave me, damn you.

Wilkes focused his eyes on the truck through the trees.

Why do you want to kill yourself, woman? Why do you want to die?

Wilkes' stomach felt as though it were a balloon filling at an exponential rate, just waiting to burst all over the forest.

Because. God impregnated me with his child, and then told me I was not pretty enough, and did not love him enough. So he left me for another.

Miss, whoever is the father of this baby, he isn't God.

Who are you to tell me? God is the absent father of all. Invisible and omnipresent.

Wilkes' lungs burned. He had to rest again against the trunk of a tree, but only allowed himself thirty seconds.

Please don't give up. Please don't give up.

Her breaths grew more and more shallow and rapid, until they quieted altogether. She grew limp. He felt the blood that had soaked through his jacket.

They arrived at the truck and Wilkes laid her in the cab, felt her pulse, and felt her pulse again. His vision cracked. He lay his head upon the tight skin of her belly.

You're okay, he said. You're okay, you're okay, you're okay.

Before he crashed he was thinking of the day he found his daughter at his doorstep. They had dressed her up in all new clothes. Even did her hair. He was thinking of the bows they had put in, bright pink bows with white stars.