

“Disorder”

and 7 Other Flashes of Character

J. Timothy King

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Disorder

She sneaks out of the house while no one is looking and heads to the bad side of the city. Her husband is upstairs reading to the kids, and she is supposedly catching up on her email. As far as she knows, no one realizes she is gone.

She strolls down the sidewalk under the dimming sky and watches the street lamps flicker as they come alive. She inhales dingy, urine-soaked air, feels cool wind on her face, catches a whiff of used cigarette smoke, and grins. She knows she could be mugged at any time, or worse. Her fear makes the experience more real. With every step her breath comes faster, her heart thumps harder. This is life, she thinks, pure, unadulterated aliveness.

She was only 11 years old the first time she snuck out. Her mother had kept her penned in the house, except on supervised outings, wouldn't even allow her to play with the neighborhood kids without a babysitter. One night she climbed out of her bedroom window and basked in the moonlight, dancing through the yard like Julie Andrews on a high mountain. As she returned, she found her mother in her empty bedroom. She received the scolding of a lifetime. What did she think she was doing? Didn't she know how much danger she had put herself in? A small girl, out alone in the middle of the night? Was she crazy? She remembered some arguing, but mostly a lot of crying.

Since then, she has been much more careful not to get caught. Not that she has never gotten caught. Once or twice, her husband and kids discovered that she was missing. She gave the excuse that she only went out for a drive, and she apologized for not telling them she was going.

A police car races down the street, lights flashing, siren blaring.

One time, shortly after her sweet sixteen, she returned to find a police car stopped outside her house and her mother sobbing inside. When she had turned up missing, Mom had assumed worse than the worst. She loved her mother and was very sorry for causing such anxiety and

grief.

A man catcalls at her, and she beams but otherwise pretends to ignore him. He follows her, and she continues on, step by step. She accelerates her pace; he, likewise. Her heart races with suspense and enthusiasm and pleasure. She spies a shop just up ahead. She can enter and be safe. Then, a loud ringing, a sharp pain on the back of her head, and everything goes dark.

She awakes in the hospital, and her first thought is, *How am I going to explain how this happened?* She begins to think up a suitable story. Maybe she was in a car accident. No, that wouldn't work. Maybe she was the victim of a freak car hijacking. Yes, that could work, if she can think of some reason for the hijacker to attack her and leave her laying on the side of the road. Maybe he just wanted to bring her to a remote place where he thought it would be safe for him to rape her.

It was nice of the shop owner to call the ambulance. Oh no: maybe he witnessed the attack. No, it's okay. She can still make her story work. She tried to escape, and he clubbed her, presumably to prevent her from getting away.

This is the story she tells the police. The poor degenerate, they will find no evidence that he was ever in her car. Only the aggravated sexual assault charge will be upheld against him.

Her next outing will be even more exciting than this one.

A Comedian's Motive

Why do I put myself through it? That's a good question. I mean, why venture out on that stage? Just to tell jokes? I don't think so. Yeah, there are all the standard reasons—and I've even told myself a few—about how laughter is healing, and people need me, and I help them, and a chuckle is worth a thousand tears, and on and on. But that's just posturing. Let me tell you the real reason why I go out on that stage, and under those stage lights, and make an idiot of myself, just to get a few laughs.

It all starts with the spotlight. You go out there and you see that spotlight shining in your eyes, and it changes you. Even before you go out on the stage, and you have butterflies in your stomach, and your hand is shaking just a little bit, and you think about that spotlight, and you think your voice is going to crack— Of course, with a voice as scratchy as mine, no one can tell the difference.

But you go out there, and that pit in your gut turns into a fire. And it's you out on that stage and them out in the audience, and then you get to face your biggest fear. You're not afraid that they'll love you or hate you. You're afraid that they won't. I don't care whether they laugh at my jokes or throw me out because of 'em. I don't care whether they smile or give me catcalls or throw tomatoes or whatever, as long as they don't ignore me.

I have this bit I perform in just about every show. It ends with me jacking off my microphone stand as if it were a five-foot-long dick. You have to be there to see the humor— It's a visual joke. Just about everyone in the whole place always laughs, but half of the audience cringes, too. And I'm bound to get a few people saying, "Eww," or "Gross!" You know? But that's okay. I don't mind that, because I'd rather see shock and hate on their faces rather than nothing at all.

Because, you know, the real reason I go out there on that stage is for people to pay attention to me. When you're in that spotlight, it's all about *you*. It's not about the jokes. It's not about the laughs. A whole room full of people, and they're all hanging on your every word. And that's a feeling you can't get anywhere else.

Too Much Information

This story is a test.

Seriously, it's a test to see whether I can magically change the future. Really.

I know you don't believe me, but let me explain. For the past three weeks, I've been dreaming the future. Actually, it's been 20 days. Today will be day 21.

It may have been going on for longer, but I first noticed it on May 21. Actually, at first, I thought it was just a coincidence. It wasn't until a few days later that I began to suspect something... paranormal. (Yeah, that's the word I want, *paranormal*. I know it sounds crazy, but that's the only word that fits.)

On Friday, May 21, a friend of mine was telling me what happened to him that morning on the way to work. He had almost gotten into a 5-car accident. (He would have been in car number 6.) And as he was telling the story, I remembered I had dreamed the night before about the same thing, an almost-accident.

In my dream, an old work colleague, who I haven't seen in years, was driving a motorcycle down I-95, and suddenly a truck ran over her. I freaked, of course, but then she got up and assured me that she and her bike were okay. It had been a near miss.

Crazy coincidence, I thought, and I told my friend about the dream I'd had. We all had a good laugh over it and didn't think any more of it.

That night, I dreamed a man with bloody feet was pushing boulders off a high hill, sending them barreling over the city of Philadelphia. Each boulder was larger than the previous, striking the city with ever more force, time and again and again and again. Finally, he reached the last boulder, and he told me not to worry, that this was the last one.

“What’s that been, five?” I said. “Why not ten? Why not twenty?” “Five is enough,” he replied, grinning.

The next day, the Red Sox shut out the Phillies, 5 to nothing.

I began writing down my dreams, all of them that I could remember, every night. Then each day, I scoured Google news to see if my dreams had come true. Over and over again, I found that they had.

- The Alaskan pipeline spill (May 25)
- Obama’s targeting of US citizens as terrorists (May 27)
- The protest march in Phoenix against the Arizona immigration law (May 29)
- The phonetic-spelling protesters at the Scripps National Spelling Bee (June 4)
- The tornado in Illinois (June 5)
- The 4-alarm fire in Henderson, Nevada (June 8)
- The 429 people arrested in a national drug raid (June 9)
- The beached whale on Jones Beach Island (June 10)

So I figured I’d try an experiment. I read up on lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming is when you wake up while you’re dreaming, just enough to know that you are in fact dreaming. And at that point you can affect what happens in your dream. You can do anything you want; after all, it is *your* dream. I even tried it a few times, just so that I knew I could dream lucidly. But I was careful not to affect anything in my dream. I just wanted to see if I could do it.

All the while, I continued to test that I was still dreaming the future, and indeed, I was. In fact, when I dreamed about the beached whale, which in my dream, appeared as a beaver caught in a trap, I saw the people coming to take it away. And dreaming lucidly, even though I felt helpless to stop them, I considered pulling out a machine gun (because after all, it was *my* dream, and I could do anything I wanted in it) and mowing them all down. But then I reconsidered, remembering that I wasn’t ready yet to progress to the next stage of this experiment. And I let them take the beaver away. I’m glad I restrained myself, because if I hadn’t, who knows what would have happened to those people in real life, the ones with the sad task of disposing of the dead whale?

But now I’m ready to futz with the future. In fact, I already have. Last night, I created my own dream, carefully designed, nothing dangerous, but specific enough that I can tell whether or not the experiment worked. I dreamed a man who had inherited a million dollars, and he walked up to a lady sitting on a park bench with her young son nearby. And he whipped out a thousand-dollar bill and gave it to her, just like that.

Remember, the actual meaning of the dream is symbolic, because the dream is a metaphor.

But I take it to mean that something extraordinarily good will have happened to someone, and he (or she) will share part of his good fortune with those around him.

So now, I ask you whether anything like that happened to you, or around you. If so, you'll have confirmed the theory that I indeed can change the future through lucid dreaming.

C'mon. Someone. At least *one* of you must have had a stroke of good fortune today.

Abigail White

She never imagined that this would be the defining moment of her life.

Born Abigail Little, she had grown up with platinum blonde hair and deep brown eyes. As a teenager, she obsessed about her appearance and social behavior. She was smart and pretty, funny and good-natured. She was the girl every boy wanted to kiss and every other girl wanted to be.

As an adult, she married and mothered. Crow's feet etched their way around her eyes, and though still potentially attractive, looks mattered progressively less to her. She bought nice clothes for her children; sweats and sneakers for herself. Her hair became frizzy and wiry. She put all her energy into her family, all her time into her home.

When the kids were old enough for school, she took a job as groundskeeper at a local amusement park. She was always cleaning up someone else's mess, but she didn't mind. In fact, it was an honor, for she knew the story of the broken window. It has been said a building can be vacant for years without becoming dilapidated, until even a single window gets broken; and then the whole building will become uninhabitable within days. Abigail knew that just one piece of trash, and her entire world would begin to disintegrate.

It was this passion she threw into her work. As a result, she was late one day. She was late picking up the kids from their after-school program. She got bawled out. Actually, the woman was very nice to this overworked mother. But Abigail couldn't see it any other way. She had failed her duty.

It was then she realized, she was being controlled by circumstances. She had lost the excitement, her passion for life, her passion for her own life. She lived for everyone else, where she had once lived for herself.

The next day, she blew off work. She got in the car and drove across the state. Then she

walked into the First Bank of Everytown, U.S.A., she walked up to a teller, pulled out her gun, and demanded they fill the satchel with cash.

An Indelible Design

I recline in one of the big comfy chairs in the corner at the local Internet café, reading a novel, immersed in conflict, challenge, adventure. She curls up in the other chair, across from mine, her feet tucked under her legs, and stares out the window. The sight pulls me from my book.

Quiet, pretty, young, she rarely smiles, even when serving customers their coffee and muffins. Each morning, I make it a point to grin long and broad, with “please” and “thanks.” But in return I rarely receive more than a rote, “Café Americano, two sixty-five.”

Then, at about 10 o’clock, she takes a break, to sit and stare. The sun peeks around the edge of a cloud overhead, now gleaming through her tender blue eyes and warming her luxurious, dark hair. Her face softens, and my heart melts, and I wonder what she thinks about.

At that moment, she raises her hand to her chin, and the sleeve of her black uniform slides down enough to reveal pieces of blue and red scribbled into her arm.

“What’s your tattoo?” I ask.

I myself have never mustered the will and courage to subject myself to the tattooist’s needle.

A frown etches its way across her face. “Nothing,” she mutters, her eyes still transfixed on the outside scene.

I shrug my eyebrows, as if to shrug off the hurt I feel. I return to the joyful fantasy of my book— Or rather, I am just about to return to it, when the girl silently unbuttons her sleeve, rolls it up, holds out her wrist, revealing a half a butterfly, its intricate wings painted in dazzling blue. The half-butterfly sits on the stem of a rose blossom, deep green and red.

“Wow,” I say. “That’s really beautiful.” Then, “Why only half a butterfly?” “The other half— flew away,” she says, returns to her window view, her frown now more pronounced than ever.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"Not your fault," she mumbles.

I try pull my eyes from hers. And fail.

I imagine her smiling, laughing, bonding with friends, close to her loved ones. Her desolate sadness stabs through my gut.

I could argue with her. True, it's not my fault that her best friend died, or moved away, or whatever happened. But I can still feel sorry. I'm allowed to feel sorry, not just with pity, but out of human kindness. In some societies, the community would rally around, sit, mourn with her. How can I sit here next to her and feel nothing? Or worse, feel only discomfort and dread, wanting only to escape from her presence, back into the safety of my novel.

But arguing with would accomplish nothing.

She sees me staring, I'm sure. If I were she, if our positions were reversed, I'd notice her staring. I'd wonder what kind of kook she was. I'd worry what kind of mess I'd gotten myself into.

"I hope," I squeak— I swallow. "I hope that you can hang out with some friends after your shift, at least."

She grunts.

"I wish there were something I could do," I admit.

She glares at me. "Well, there isn't. Haley was the only real friend I had. And now she's gone. She was the only one who knew how to love everyone as they were. There will never be another person like her, ever. So don't even try!"

She runs to the ladies room, and I can feel numerous pairs of eyes throwing glances in our direction.

I gulp down the rest of my now-tepid coffee, place the cup and saucer in the dish-return. Carrying my book, I stroll toward the exit, already having decided to return tomorrow morning to see how she's getting along.

Just A Bite of Coffee and Ice Cream

Her great claim to fame was that she failed Freshman English Lit. Twice.

How is it even possible to fail English Lit? Think about it. This is a course that has no real requirements, save that you show up and say something. Yes, you're supposed to read the novel that everyone else is also reading. But lesser students had squeaked by on the Cliff Notes, or even outright faking it.

Even so, she managed to fail English Lit. Twice. And so ended her college career. She promptly moved back in with her parents. She discussed the situation with them only in sketches. Her father asked her what she was going to do now. She replied that she didn't know, which was the truth. He quietly accepted her answer. He didn't seem upset. He seemed a little worried.

She took a service-industry job at a local ice-cream-and-coffee place, promptly proving her klutziness. She was constantly getting ice-cream flavors mixed up, or putting half-and-half in a customer's coffee instead of milk. When her boss asked her to wipe down the counter, she promptly sprayed cleaning fluid all over the lemon sorbet. This made him none too happy and earned her a sharp rebuke. She couldn't even pour a fruit smoothy without fucking it up—spilled it all over the floor.

As she is returning from the back with a mop and pail, the last customer of the morning rush walks out. The place is empty except for Dawn, her coworker, who says, "Don't worry about him. He's an ass."

"Who?"

"Samson." That's her boss.

"He gives everyone a hard time," Dawn says. "I think he's trying to compensate for other

inadequacies." Dawn makes a humping motion with her hips.

The girl turns her attention to the puddle of strawberry-red liquid with melting chunks on the floor and begins to sop up what she can with the mop.

Dawn continues. "He even once scolded Tom... the owner. Have you met him?" The girl shakes her head, no.

"Big guy, dark hair... Anyhow, you'll meet him eventually. Pretty easy going. You'll like him. Anyhow, Samson chews him out, right in front of a customer." Takes a moment to grin. "I've never seen Tom's face turn that color before. He takes Samson into the back for a private chat. That was actually kinda fun."

A pause, with the slurp of the mop occasionally interrupting the adult-contemporary playing in the background.

"Has he made a pass at you yet?" Dawn asks.

No, he hasn't. She's not even worthy enough to be sexually harassed.

"My first day here, he pinches my ass and starts flicking his tongue at me. Says it's a *demonstration* of his *ah-bil-ah-TAYz*."

Dawn so flawlessly imitates Samson's inflection, when he's trying to sound cool, that the girl can't help but giggle. She stops her mopping for a moment and turns to Dawn. Soberly, "Did you report him?"

"No. I actually kind of like holding it over him." Then Dawn changes her tone. "But don't let that stop you. If you want to get him, I'll stick up for you." There's just a drop of vitriol in her voice.

No, the girl shakes her head. "He hasn't done anything to me." Sadly.

A pause.

"He's probably intimidated by you," Dawn says. "You're too good looking, out of his league. He's probably afraid your family has an army of lawyers or something. I wouldn't mind that," without missing a beat, "seeing him taken down a few pegs. I don't even know why Tom keeps him around. He does drugs, doesn't work. He's probably out back toking up right now." Stares at the ceiling, thoughtful. "Don't think he's related. Tom must owe his family or something."

The girl laughs. Something about the way Dawn said it must have struck her funny. "I'm sorry," she says. "I didn't mean to laugh."

"No, that's okay," Dawn says. "You gotta maintain your sense of humor around here." Dawn is smiling.

"Actually, the job isn't that bad. It's just Samson, that's all. I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong idea. I didn't mean to unload on you."

"What's so wrong about that?" the girl asks.

A customer arrives. But before serving him, Dawn says, "Would you like to grab a bite after work?" Then almost as an afterthought, she adds, "You know, you'd make a good shrink."

Perhaps to Dream

Head down in the middle of her solid mahogany desk, eyelids blocking the mid-morning sun from the searing pain behind the bridge of her nose, the expanse of her office morphed into a loosely packed suburb of rich greens and blues. A month of late-night facts and figures melted into the insanity of random imagination. Her Starbucks dark-roast tasted like Kahlúa. The bottle of store-brand ibuprofen became a mailman in sexy shorts, delivering packages of happiness.

“We finally made it!” she bragged.

He wrapped strong hands around the back of her shoulders and her aching neck muscles, and firmly massaged. “Mmm,” she groaned, and stretched and relaxed her neck.

“I’ll pick up the kids and meet you at six?” he said.

She nodded, laid back on her mahogany deckchair, closed her eyes again, and sipped her Kahlúa. A long, deep *sigh*.

Then thunder boomed from the overcast sky. “What the hell do I pay you for?!” The voice pierced through her brain.

“Ssh,” she mumbled to the intruder, with his doughnut gut, hulking shoulders, and close-cropped greying hair. “Inside voices, please, Bart.”

“Hey, you do the wine, you pay the time.” His voice remained as loud as before.

“I’m not hung over, and that doesn’t even make sense,” she said.

“Right!” The thunder felt like it was getting closer. “Look, I don’t care what you do on your own time, just don’t let it affect your work performance.”

Breathe deeply. *Jackass*. “What do you want, Bart?” “We need to move Project Limerick up another month. I need an updated schedule by five this afternoon.” He smirked.

“Half my staff is out with the flu,” she said. “And I don’t even know what we can trim to do it a month faster.”

“We aren’t trimming anything. You’ll just have to rearrange the schedule and work faster.” He turned to leave.

“In what universe?” *Pang!* A burst of pain shot through her left eyeball, and she squinted.

“Look,” he said, “I don’t care what you do in your free time, but when it starts interfering with your job performance, I begin to get concerned. You can sleep at home, not at work, or you can find a job that doesn’t interfere so much with your personal life. Got it?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “I’m leaving at five, so get that schedule to me.” He slammed the door on his way out.

A tear appeared at the corner of her left eye. She sniffled.

When was the last time I had “free time”? Anger. She couldn’t remember.

Nausea tunneled through her torso.

When was the last time I had a personal life? She remembered the last boyfriend she had lost. *He was nice. Not every man is a jackass.*

That thought consumed her last bit of emotional energy.

Now on automatic, she walked through through the cubicle passageway toward the exit. Bart stood in an employee’s cube-office, and she took just enough time to shoot him a “Fuck you!” on her way past.

She slumbered for over 18 hours, and dreamed sweet dreams.

The next morning, over craigslist and coffee, the company CEO called her. He said most of the department had walked out the previous afternoon, inspired by her act of defiance. Her fault.

Then he said, “So Bart’s not with the company anymore. Can you take his job? At least for a little while?”

Baby Boy

Ted Jackson reclined on a park bench at lunch thinking about what it was like to turn 30.

The overcast sky had provided him a brief respite from the drizzling rain, and so he decided to stroll through a nearby park during his lunch hour. He wasn't much hungry, because his mind was full of thoughts, about Clydene, about love, about progress, about failure, about meaning.

When he had sat on the bench, he felt its moist coating leech through his pant legs. Normally the feeling would make him jump up in disgust, but today, he just didn't care one way or the other. He didn't suffer the chill breeze that gusted in his face. Neither did he enjoy the moist, fresh aroma of a late summer day cleansed by the rain. His mind was too full of other thoughts.

Ted didn't usually feel discouraged, because he didn't allow himself to feel discouraged. But sometimes life's frustrations mounted and built inside of him, until he did something stupid, and that's what had happened today.

He blew up at a client, a wealthy, important client whom he was representing in an ongoing criminal case. He almost lost the firm the case, which was only saved by removing Ted from it and promising to discipline him severely.

He was never going to make partner this way.

And it wasn't like he really did anything wrong. Yeah, maybe he did overreact a little, but it's not like the guy didn't have it coming to him. This jerk-wad was guilty as sin, wanted a miracle acquittal, and refused to level with Ted, withheld fundamental information about the case. Ted should have just told him to get lost, but his boss wouldn't have heard of it.

Ted shook his head at the stupidity of it all.

Then his mind wandered to Clydene. He had met Clydene last month, packing envelopes for a

political campaign. Ted usually didn't have time for such activities, but there were some causes he was passionate about, and he made a little time once in a while for them. That particular weekend, it paid off, because he met Clyde, long, fiery hair, curly, sweet-smelling springs of red silk, running down past her shoulders, with a pale, freckled complexion and brown eyes, delicate, arched eyebrows, and a voice that struck like a cutlass into his soul. Even now, Ted longed to reach out and touch her, because she had touched his soul as no other woman.

When they went out that one time, she seemed to understand his mind. She spoke the words he thought, which he would never say. He had never met someone with whom he had connected that deeply. It excited him with a whole new series of thoughts and feelings.

But that was over.

They hadn't broken up— Hell, they had hardly dated! And they were still friends. But Ted had his career to think about, as did Clyde, along with her community work. That's where their priorities were. Neither one of them was ready to become attached. So they decided to go their separate ways.

That was another decision that didn't seem to be working out as it should.

Today, Ted turned 30, and he really thought by now he would have made partner and gotten married. But he wasn't, not even close, and he even felt his life slipping backward. He actually considered giving up on what he had, changing direction completely, because he did not feel as though he had accomplished anything worthwhile. Thirty years, a milestone: if not an accomplishment, then a setback.

Even so, if one were to regard him, one would not be able to discern the myriad thoughts swirling within his mind, or how much they disturbed him, because though Ted had no trouble telling others what to do, he rarely revealed to them the inner sanctum of his mind.

Ted's attention was suddenly drawn to an elderly Jewish gentleman, wearing a *kippah*, who came hobbling along the path, with each step supporting one side of his body with a cane, which made a clacking noise as it hit the asphalt, then dragging the opposite foot as he unsuccessfully tried to lift it. *C-Clack, scrape. C-Clack, scrape.*

He stumbled up to the bench on which Ted was reclining. "May I sit for a moment?" he asked with a smile.

Ted nodded. "Sure. Help yourself."

He collapsed on the bench, and before he hit the seat, he began making small-talk with Ted. He spoke in a gentle, soothing voice that mesmerized, like the voice of a hypnotist. He talked about the weather, the rain, the sun, the flowers. Ted nodded, hardly aware of what the man was saying, but also no longer thinking his own thoughts.

"Everything all right, son?" the man said.

"Huh?" Ted must have drifted off.

"Am I boring you?" He chuckled.

"No, but nothing in my life is working as it ought to." Ted had already spoken the words before he realized what he was saying.

"Hmm." The man paused, his hand resting on his cane.

He continued. "We have a story like that in our tradition." "Yeah?" Ted asked.

"There was a man named *Elkanah*, who had two wives. One of his wives, *P'ninnah* gave him many sons and daughter. Now, this was back in the day, you understand, when it was very important for a man to have many children to carry on his legacy."

Ted nodded.

"But his other wife, Hannah..." He shook his head. "Not so many children. As a matter of fact, Hannah had no children at all. Whenever she had gotten pregnant, she had lost the child. So not only did she not have any children, she also suffered the loss of every child she ever might have had.

"Now, *Elkanah* loved both of his wives very much, and he loved Hannah especially. So each year, when they traveled up to the Tabernacle at Shiloh—which back then was the Holy City of Israel— *Elkanah* would give each of his wives a part of the sacrifice, but he gave Hannah twice as much.

"I personally think he felt sorry for her and wanted to make her feel special.

"But, eh, that kind of backfired on Hannah. *P'ninnah* didn't take too kindly to playing second fiddle, and she taunted Hannah every chance she got. She made fun of her for having no children, and did everything she could think of to make Hannah feel miserable, until Hannah was so upset, she sank into depression and wouldn't eat. She just sat and cried.

“This happened every year. And so *Elkanah* came to her, and held her head, and caressed her, and said to her, ‘Please don’t cry. Don’t you know that I love you? And aren’t I worth more to you than even ten sons?’

“But Hannah continued to feel bad.”

Ted knew the feeling.

“So she went to the Tabernacle, and she prayed to God. She was so upset, she couldn’t even speak the words. She just silently wept and whispered to herself, hoping that God would hear her thoughts. And she made God a promise, that if he gave her a son, she would dedicate him to God’s service.

“But the priest saw her and thought she was drunk. And he scolded her, ‘How long will you keep getting drunk!?’

“So that’s what she got for her trouble.

“She pleaded with him, though, that she had not drunk at all, but that she was in grief and pouring out her soul to God.

“So the priest softened his voice and blessed her and said, ‘May God grant you what you’ve asked.’”

At this point, the old, Jewish man struggled to his feet and began to move on. Ted had been transfixed by the man’s story and felt as though he had now been cut off mid-stream. He was bewildered that the man would get up and walk away, just like that, without finishing the story.

“So, how did it turn out?” Ted asked, exasperated. “For Hannah?” “Oh,” the man said. “She had a baby boy, who grew up to be a judge and prophet, one of the most eminent men in Jewish history. She named him Samuel, which means, ‘God has heard,’ because, she said, ‘I asked the Lord for him.’ You may have heard stories of Samuel.” Yes, Ted had, and he decided not to give up, not just yet.

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