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# DOORS OF THE OCEAN

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STACEY W. ROBERTS

The first bell rings as classes exchange and the crowded hallway starts to clear as kids scurry into their different classrooms. Caylan enters Mrs. Washington's Creative Writing class and notices James sitting at his desk staring blankly with his chin in his palm. He walks over to him.

"I'm sorry about your dad. Uh, it's good to see you back," he says.

"Get lost, Jesus-freak!" says Gabe as he bombards his way in. "James, my man you're back!" He pats him on both shoulders.

"Uh, yeah," he says and stands, pulls his pants up and his shirt tail down.

Caylan sheepishly walks away.

"So, dude, after school my— "

"Gabe, I gotta whiz, man."

James heads towards the door and gets one foot across the threshold.

"Mr. Kirby," says Mrs. Washington.

"Oh, sorry. I need to use the restroom," says James.

"That's fine, sir, but please ask next time," she says.

"Okay," he barely mutters as he dashes out of the room.

"Hey, Mrs. Washington I have to use the bathroom," says Gabe as he begins to head out of the door.

"No, you do not, sir," says Mrs. Washington.

"But, I gotta go real bad," Gabe says as he grabs his crotch and begins to bounce.

"Well, you'll just have to wait until James comes back," she says. "And watch your grammar."

###

It appears that the winter weather had finally broke and it was an unseasonably warm day for February. So just about everyone gathers for lunch outside. The *gamers* have their heads down with their thumbs racing; every now and then stopping to take a bite of a snickers. The *brains* eat their sandwiches as they read or get an early start on homework. The *stoners* nibble brownies and giggle. The *jocks* scarf hot dogs and guzzle cokes; James just sits as they fling a football back and forth past him. Caylan looks up after giving thanks for his food from the *loner* table, and watches him.

“Ey, catch,” says Gabe to James as he pumps the football.

“Nah, I’m good.”

“Okay, well dude you gonna eat?” he asks.

“Not really hungry.”

Gabe shakes his head. “Well, I am.” He pushes the remainder of half of a hot dog into his mouth with his index finger. “What’s weirdo staring at?” He points over to Caylan’s table.

“What, freak?” he shouts out to Caylan as he stretches his eyes and lifts both hands.

Caylan looks away.

“Leave the dude alone,” says James.

“Your God’s not over here, buddy,” says Gabe.

“Gabe, chill,” says James.

“Dude, I’m saying. No one wants to always hear that crap. Ooh, God, the big, bad boogey-man.”

James watches Caylan as he throws his lunch bag away and walks back into the building.

“You believe in the boogey-man?” Gabe asks James.

“Nah, man,” says James.

###

“So, how was school today?” Caylan’s mom asks as she brings his dinner plate to the table.

“Uh, same,” he says as he takes the plate, “Thanks, mom.” He bows his head. *Heavenly Father, thank you for this food that I’m about to receive for the nourishment of my physical body. Amen.*

His mom sits down and begins to eat. “So, did you talk to your friend James today?”

“He’s not really my friend, mom.”

“Well, you’ve been talking about him lately, I guess I just assumed you were. Especially with all you have in common.”

“We pretty much only have one thing in common. That definitely doesn’t make us friends.”

“But, it does give you a connection. So, you can become friends. Honey, he suddenly lost his father just like you did. And I’m so proud of how strong and brave you’ve been.”

“I guess.”

“Well, you’ve come through it, this well... WE, have come through it, this well because we turned to God, and He’s on our side.”

“I get that. But, you don’t know what it’s like walking around school being called a freak just because I’m a believer.”

“That doesn’t only happen at school, hon. Keep living,” she chuckles and clears the plates. “Dessert?”

“Nah, I have some homework to finish up.” He kisses her cheek.

“Cay? Stay faithful, son. You know He’s real.”

###

Gabe exhales three smoke rings. "Here." He holds out his left hand to pass a joint.

James shakes his head "no."

"You don't want to hit this 'L' James?"

"Nah, man."

"Dude what is up with you?" he asks as he takes another drag.

"N'un."

"Nothing my ass. You've been dragging around here like you've lost your damn best friend!"

James puts his backpack on and starts up the basement stairs.

"Damn. Dude, sorry bruh."

James stomps all the way up and heads towards the front door.

Gabe calls behind him, "My bad, man."

James opens Gabe's front door.

"James," Gabe's mother asks, "Uh, how's your mother, dear?"

"Great," James says and slams the door shut.

###

James snatches open his front door. It startles his mother who is watching television in the living room. She tries to stop her video, but hits pause instead. Frozen on the screen is her and his dad formally-dressed, with wine glasses intertwined. "I'm sorry," she says as she turns the T.V. off. Her eyes are puffy and red and her face is damp. She clears her throat. "Have you eaten?"

"Nah, I'm good."

“Son.”

“I said I’m good.”

He goes down the hallway and into his room. He throws his backpack into the corner and slams himself onto his bed. Two tears roll down the right side of his face, then more on the left. He grabs his pillow and hugs it over his face. “I don’t know how to do this!” he screams into the pillow, “God, I don’t know how to do this! God…”

###

“Psst…Psst,” Gabe says trying to get James’ attention.

“Mr. Hedley, you are to work on this assignment independently and with no talking,” says Mrs. Washington.

“Alright,” he says.

Mrs. Washington gets up from her desk to write tonight’s homework on the white board.

“Psst,” says Gabe.

“I’m warning you,” Mrs. Washington said without turning around.

“Sorry,” he says.

She continues to write.

“Dude, I know you hear me though,” says Gabe.

“That’s it, Mr. Hedley, lunch will be with me today!”

###

Outside for lunch, the groups gather as usual, except for James who finds himself at the *loner* table. He spots Caylan eating an apple and reading his devotional bible. *Really dude, at school.* Caylan looks up and they make eye contact. He quickly closes his bible and waves “hello” to James.

He scoots down so that he is directly in front of Caylan. “You really believe in all that stuff?” he asks.

Caylan looks confused.

He points to the book “That bible stuff,” he says, “You know, God.”

“Yeah,” says Caylan. “Why wouldn’t I?” he asks.

“I don’t know, man. It just all seems kinda ‘boooo’ right,” he says with both hands in front of him wrinkling his fingers.

“Nope, not to me. He’s protecting and comforting me, and I trust in Him.”

“So, you believe there’s some dude in the sky, watching over and controlling us down here?”

“Something like that.”

“Yeah, right.” James taps on the table. “So, my dad’s there, you know, in the sky with him. With this, God?”

“I can’t tell you exactly where your dad is. Or mine, for that matter.”

“Exactly! That’s what I’m saying, just fake. How do you believe this mess?”

“Well, I feel Him in my heart. But, I can’t feel for you. I can try to show you though.”

Caylan pulls out a pen and opens his notebook. He draws a picture of the Earth on it. “Look at this.”

“Big deal,” says James “it’s the Earth.”

“Okay, what’s the Earth made mostly of?”

“What?”

“What’s the Earth made mostly of?”

James shrugs, “Water.”

“That’s right, water. So, tell me, if the Earth is made mostly of water, why hasn’t it spilled over and drowned us all?”

“Dude, what?”

“Seriously, think about it. When you go to the beach, you can’t even see how far the ocean goes out, can you?”

“I guess.”

“No, really. Imagine yourself, standing on your balcony at the beach. And you’re looking at the water. Can you see where it ends?”

“Nah, I guess not.”

“Well, do you know where it starts?”

“I don’t know, where the sand is,” says James as he holds his hands up to question Caylan.

“Are you sure it’s there?” he asks.

“Dude, I don’t know, is it?”

“Well, why doesn’t it keep going as far on where that sand starts or stops like how far you look out on it from your balcony?”

“These are scientific questions, that obviously were answered when I was absent,” says James.

“Is it science?”

“Well, I can’t answer it. I mean, no, it doesn’t make sense to me why the water doesn’t just spill over and drown us all. I mean, there has to be some force, right?”

“Some force. You’re exactly right. James, can I read you something?”

“Why not.”

Caylan opens his bible to Job, chapter thirty-eight. He begins to read at verse eight. *“Who created the ocean? Who caused it to be born? I put clouds over it as if they were its clothes. I wrapped it in thick darkness. I set limits for it. I put its doors and metal bars in place. I said, ‘You can come this far. But you can’t come any farther. Here is where your proud waves have to stop.’ “*

James stretches his eyes in amazement. “Dude, how does something that makes no sense, make so much sense?”

“Some force, eh?”