



Kate Kelsen

He
Opted
For
Heaven

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by

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As a parent I instilled in my children a sense of purpose, and the knowledge that there was no sorrow that couldn't be healed. Joel was very open about the sudden change in his mind. One day he'd woken up with a head full of crushing turmoil, and we were left with only four months to help him. Joel had stopped taking his antidepressants a week before the incident. On the Friday he had enrolled to study nursing at university, and was due to fly to America on the Monday for his first overseas holiday. On the Sunday afternoon, the police had found him at the end of a noose.

I had just arrived home from the Sunday morning church service when I was told the news. As those dreadful words fell upon my ears I felt every ounce of hope being sapped from my body. I have never felt so alone as I did in that moment. The guidance that I had always trusted to accompany me through my life felt suddenly absent. I asked myself how something so horrible could happen in my family. After all my efforts, how could my precious Joel still feel so dismissible to this world?

My Christian faith is the pinnacle of my interpretation of the world and all the things that happen in it, however in mourning Joel I found I had to separate my understanding of his passing from the only system I had ever trusted. I came to accept that the place where Joel had found himself that Sunday afternoon was so dark that even I could not have pulled him out of it.

Alongside my prayers I pondered every principle I have ever believed in. I felt ashamed but I could not deny the presence of doubt in my mind. I grew up in a churchgoing family, and the beliefs by which I was raised had taught me that we did not decide when and how we died. The act of suicide rejects the gift of life, and nobody should presume to take such authority upon themselves. But what of my son, who took his time into his own hands? In that moment of finality, when Joel had determined that he had had enough, how had he been so confident in his decision?

These days I maintain a humbling sense of naivety, as it is quite clear to me that I don't even know what will happen tomorrow. The days are still hard, and there is a gaping hole in our family home. I know it will get easier eventually, and that there will still be times years from now when it will feel as raw as it does today. Everything I have

ever believed in was challenged on that Sunday afternoon. I just have to give it time.

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