

MYSTERIOUS WAYS

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FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM -- DAY

A sparse room with a bunk bed against the wall.

ROB (11) in a white button up shirt and grey trousers, a bit too short, makes the bottom bed to match the top neatly made mattress.

Two sets of shoes are against one wall, one neat black shiny pair, the other, threadbare with holes where the big toes have stuck through.

Rob pulls on a pair of socks that are completely worn out. He puts on the black shoes, combs his hair.

DAN (O.S.)  
No excuses! Now hurry, church  
starts in twenty minutes.

Rob cringes, finishes tying his shoes.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN DAY

DAN (40), a belly hanging over his trousers, his shirt buttons tight, hair wetly combed to one side, glares at Sam (5), who clings to his mother, MARY'S leg.

SAM  
Mommy, I don't feel so good.

Mary peels Sam from her leg, goes down on her haunches to speak to him. She feels his forehead, watches Dan with a look of concern.

MARY  
Maybe you just need some fresh air.

Dan brushes against her as he opens the kitchen door.

DAN  
All of you. Let's get a move on it.  
Rob!

Rob runs into the kitchen as the family leaves the house.

EXT. FIELD -- DAY

The family of four trudges from their house across the field. They walk widely apart, Dan in front, followed by Mary and then the two boys.

The church lies on the other side of the field.

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

A few people are seated in the tiny room.

Dan, Mary, Rob and Sam shuffle into a bench in the middle of the church so that Sam is seated next to his father and Rob on the other side of him.

A COUPLE in front of them turns to greet them and Dan puts on his best smile, shakes hands with the GENT.

INT. CHURCH -- LATER

PREACHER LIONEL (30s) stands in front of the small gathering with a Bible in one hand. He is totally entranced in his sermon.

PREACHER LIONEL

I am reading to you from Judges six, verses thirty six to forty. 'Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, prove it to me in this way. I will put a wool fleece on the ground tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised." And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew." So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew.

Preacher Lionel puts the Bible down, casts his eyes across the listeners.

PREACHER LIONEL (CONT'D)

We often question God and what our purpose in life is. We become full of despair and feel that our load is too heavy. But if you trust in the Lord. Pray to him. Bring our problems over to him, God will be there for you. In this passage, Gideon was afraid. Many people's lives depended on him. Gideon made a strange request, let the wool be wet with dew in the morning, and God let Gideon know that he was there for him. But Gideon asked again, that the wool be dry and the ground wet with dew. And God, being a patient God, answered Gideon's request again--

Sam leans closer to Rob and whispers.

SAM

My tummy hurts...

Rob's eyes widen, he holds his finger to his lips to silence Sam.

ROB

Shh.

PREACHER LIONEL (V.O.)

God knows all of our problems and he is waiting for us to ask for--

Dan discreetly moves his hand against Sam's leg, pinches Sam hard. He leans down close to Sam's ear.

DAN

Settle down, you hear me?

Tears stream down Sam's cheeks as he clutches his stomach.

Dan grips Sam's arm to yank him back to attention.

Sam holds his mouth spews vomit through his fingers over his nice pair of black shoes.

Dan startles.

The whole congregation is staring at them.

Mary jumps up.

MARY  
I'm so sorry. Oh dear!

Mary's bottom lip quivers.

Preacher Lionel stops talking, walks towards them.

Sam continues to dry wretch.

PREACHER LIONEL  
Sam, are you okay?

Dan rubs Sam's head, smiles apologetically at Preacher Lionel.

DAN  
I was just saying to Mary this morning, Sam here was looking a little poorly, but she insisted, of course, that he must come here to hear God's word.

Mary looks down, embarrassed.

MARY  
I'm so sorry.

Mary digs for a tissue in her bag, leans across Dan attempt to wipe Sam off.

DAN  
Can't you do anything right, Woman?

PREACHER LIONEL  
Mary, please don't worry...

Rob gently removes Sam's shoes, glances up and catches Preacher Lionel looking at him, kindly.

Dan gets up, bustles out of the pew, forcing Mary backwards.

DAN  
Come on, boys.

SAM  
Mommy...

Mary looks away from Sam.

MARY  
I'll go find a mop.

Dan puts his arm around Sam and feigns concern.

Sam begins to shake and attempts to pull away, but Dan keeps a tight grip on his arm.

Preacher Lionel smiles at the attendees. But notices the fear in Sam's eyes.

PREACHER LIONEL

Wouldn't it be lovely if we move to  
under the tree outside. God has  
blessed us today by allowing us to  
appreciate the outdoors.

As everyone leaves the church, Dan glares at Sam.

DAN

You just wait until we get home,  
boy.

Sam presses his head into Rob's shoulder.

INT. HOUSE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Rob sits on the top bunk, his eyes closed tight.

The sound of a belt thrashing down on skin O.S. Sam wails  
O.S. Rob winces.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY -- SAME

Mary leans against the wall next to the closed bathroom door,  
she flinches each time Dan belts Sam in the bathroom. Tears  
stream down her cheeks.

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM -- SAME

Dan raises the belt high with Sam bent over his lap.

Mary bursts into the room, grabs the belt mid air to stop  
Dan's assault.

Dan shoves Sam off. He hits the wall. Mary nudges Sam out of  
the room.

MARY

Go back to your room, honey.

She closes the door, and glares at Dan with great resolve.

Dan clenches his teeth and nostrils flair. He backhands Mary across the face enraged.

Mary raises her arm arms to protect her face and cowers in the corner.

Dan rushes out, slamming the door behind him.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY -- SAME

Sam, sobbing in fear, scurries down the hall and enters his room.

INT. HOUSE - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Sam sleeps in the bottom bunk. He whimpers in his sleep.

Rob climbs down from the top bunk.

He leans close to Sam's ear and whispers.

ROB

Don't you worry. I know what to do.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Rob tip-toes into the room, opens a basket that stands on the floor. Two balls of wool lie together with some knitting on the needles.

Rob unwinds some wool from the second ball around his fingers until he has a wad of it. He places the rest back into the basket.

Rob opens the door to outside, closes it quietly behind himself.

EXT. FIELD -- NIGHT

Rob trudges through the grass. As he breathes, wisps of air curl in front of his mouth and nose in the cold.

He reaches the middle of the field, places the ball of wool on the ground and drops to his knees, his hands together in prayer.

ROB

God, please I need to know you're there.

(MORE)

ROB (CONT'D)  
Like Gideon asked in the Bible,  
please let the wool be wet in the  
morning and the ground around it  
dry.

INT. PARISH HOUSE - BEDROOM -- SAME

A double bed is in the center of the room. A cross hangs  
against the wall.

Preacher Lionel tosses in the bed. He sits up, walks over to  
the window, looks out.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Preacher Lionel sees Rob on his knees in the distance. He  
covers his mouth, shakes his head.

EXT. FIELD -- DAY

The sun is just rising.

Rob runs into the field to where he left the wool. The ground  
is empty, the wool is missing.

He searches around the area, shocked.

He clenches his fists, tears well in his eyes. He screams to  
the sky.

ROB  
You're not real!

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

The church is empty.

Preacher Lionel pours grape juice into small glasses.

CLOSE UP

One glass has a tiny chip.

He pulls out a mixture from his pocket, pours some into the  
glass and fills it up with grape juice.

END CLOSE UP

He forms a cross over his chest with his hand.



The first member of the congregation arrive.

Preacher Lionel places everything on a table.

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

The churchgoers file to the front for communion. Each person kneels in front of Preacher Lionel. He hands them a wafer and a small glass, blesses them.

Mary and Dan shuffle forward and kneel.

Preacher Lionel hands Mary a glass, then his hands moves over the glasses, stops at the chipped one. He pauses before picking up the glass.

He hands the chipped glass to Dan. He watches, enthralled, as Dan downs the liquid.

Dan and Mary return to their seats.

Dan staggers as he reaches his seat. He clutches his chest, gasps and coughs.

Mary watches him confused, leans and whispers. Dan pushes her away.

He stands up, unbuttons another two buttons of his shirt, takes deep breaths, his face turns puffy and red.

He steps into the walk way, then falls over, sputtering.

Mary stares at him, her eyes dull, while the other parishioners rush to Dan's aid.

EXT. CHURCH -- DAY

Everybody stands outside, shocked.

Dan's body is wheeled away in a body bag.

Rob and Sam stand together, stunned.

Preacher Lionel walks over to them, places his hand on Rob's shoulder, gives it a gentle squeeze.

Rob winces. A bruise peeks out from under his shirt.

PREACHER LIONEL  
I know you must be questioning  
God's existence.

Rob shakes his head.

ROB  
No, Father, of course not.

Preacher Lionel smiles at him.

PREACHER LIONEL  
It's okay. I do it all the time.

ROB  
You do?

Rob looks down at the ground in shame.

PREACHER LIONEL  
God doesn't show himself in the  
ways we want him to. Sometimes we  
need to dig a little deeper to see  
how he answers our prayer.

He watches as they load Dan's body into the vehicle.

PREACHER LIONEL (CONT'D)  
I think maybe your prayers were  
answered today, Rob.

Preacher Lionel pulls the ball of wool from his pocket,  
places it in Rob's hand.

FADE OUT.