



Of Fathers & Gods: Stories

Jim Roberts

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Jim Roberts's gritty short story collection *Of Fathers & Gods* reconciles ideas of fatherhood with faith.

Told from a miscellany of viewpoints, these stories are forceful when it comes to the most challenging parts of being human. They touch on grief, loss, anger, and regret with elements of humor and sensitivity that make their heaviness more palatable. In "While Her Guitar Gently Weeps," a man struggles with public shame and subsequent regret after losing his wife and child in a mass shooting. In "Tender, Like My Heart," a woman who's a victim of human trafficking recalls her relationship with her father. And stories including "Pocketknife" and "Bonfire" include themes of fractured fatherhoods.

Fathers and faith intertwine within the heart of each story, whose narrators are fathers, lost fathers, or despise their fathers. The tales examine the idiosyncrasies and complications of such roles well, illustrating the grotesque and sublime natures of paternal relationships with razor-sharp observations and uncomfortable familiarity. Lurking in the challenges and struggles, the question of God confronts each character at some crucial moment. In forms including those of an eccentric street preacher, a door-to-door miracle worker, and the ghost of a father's faith, the divine invades each narrator's life, prompting reconciliation with not just their human father but with their heavenly father. The consistent dives into these dual issues result in a collection that reveals the spiritual through the material world.

The stories collected in *Of Fathers & Gods* excel at walking the thin line between the profane and profound. In doing so, they resonate with veracity, empathy, and meaning, proffering insights into the mess of human existence.

N.T. MCQUEEN (May / June 2024)

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