

But the Greatest of These is Love

A one-act play
by Amanda Schumacher

Amanda Schumacher
2520 N. 70th St., Apt A
Wauwatosa, WI 53213
262-409-3062
ashoesmaker@gmail.com

Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

1 Samuel 18:3

Cast

The Pastor's Wife. Also known as Sara. Late 30s.

Time & The Place

A mid-sized, conservative, Lutheran church.
Sometime after 2015, somewhere in Iowa.

Setting & Props

A bare stage, a Bible, and a bottle of red wine.

(Lights fade up. We see THE PASTOR'S WIFE, aka SARA, an average woman in her late 30s, standing center stage. She holds a bottle of wine. She is attempting to pray. She is also mildly drunk).

Dear Heavenly Father. Dear Lord.

Hey God, it's been a minute.

(sings to the tune of "God Help the Outcasts") 'I don't know if you can hear me...'

'Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret.'

Actually it's Sara, but the sentiment is the same. Let's try this again.

Hi.

(she clasps her hands in prayer around the neck of the wine bottle)

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. *(looks at bottle of wine in her hand)* Oh, not this. This is not the wine we use for the Sacrament. I mean, it is but—as I'm sure you know—it comes in a 12-pack from Costco and this is a completely different bottle. It was the only thing we had in the house. Trust me, Mogen David wouldn't be my first choice.

Wow. For a pastor's wife, this is a really shitty prayer.

Sorry! It's the wine. Okay, it's not the wine. I say shit. A lot. And the whole reason I'm even here is because the overall situation is pretty, solidly shitty. But still—sorry for all the...shits.

(She looks around) You know, I wonder how much swearing these church walls have heard over the years. Probably plenty of "damns" and "hells" but those don't count when used in the proper context. Maybe a few "craps." I've heard Adam drop the big one several times during our marriage, but something tells me the reason he likes to practice his sermons over here is to keep those to a minimum. I can't believe we've called this place our home for the last 15 years.

I remember those days like they were yesterday: fresh-out-of-divinity school and zealous for the Lord, Adam pattered us into the parking lot out there with our '93 Civic on two dollars worth of gas. All we owned was that car, a few suitcases and a brand new Kitchen Aid mixer—a wedding present from my grandparents; still unopened in its box. Because between the Greek and the Hebrew and graduation and my double shifts at the hospital, the only dinners we ate came prepackaged in Styrofoam cups or frozen cardboard boxes with easy to read microwave instructions.

I may have been a pastor's wife, but pot roast and meatloaf and homemade, fresh-from-the-oven cookies are for when you have time and energy and don't work 18 hours in the ICU.

And certainly not when you're pregnant.

Oh, yeah—the one, Christian newlywed cliché we embraced: virgins having loads of wild, unrepressed sex on their honeymoon with no idea as to how birth control actually works. And of course—everyone knew, because old Gloria in the office doesn't understand how secrets work. Then again, it was nice when the church showered us with love, pantry items and diapers.

You know, the one thing about prayers that has never made sense to me? You already know all of this stuff that I'm telling you.

You know about the baby shower and when we got married and the exact moment I got pregnant. You know I've always been better at inserting IVs than turkey basting our Thanksgiving dinners. And You even know the stuff most people don't, like my miscarriages or Adam's struggle with addictions and why there's only Mogen David in the parsonage...

And. You know about Isaiah.

Yep. That's what tonight is all about. Isaiah. He came out to me today.

That's correct. The pastor's son—our choir loft's earth angel with a voice that rivals the sound of trumpets and a huge heart that puts the apostles to shame—is gay.

Not that You're surprised by this.

I think on some level, we always knew. Or at least I did. Somehow. Somehow mothers always know. I mean, I never gave any thought to the tea parties or playing dress up, or how he was so careful with everything: bugs, riding a bike, grades. But I also never gave any thought to his passion for playing catch with his dad, his huge collection of toy trucks, or his vehement hatred of baths.

I simply viewed my child as my child, gender norms be darned. And that hasn't changed. But that's not what I'm struggling with.

What I am struggling with is everything that can be found within these four walls. I feel like a walking contradiction.

Because for the past 15 years, I've been the wife of a pastor who preaches at a church where the only times queer relationships come up in sermons or Bible class is when they are in relation to Leviticus or Lot and I've never once questioned it.

And at the same time? I think my son and his boyfriend are super cute together.

They met at school in the library, during study hall freshmen year, because of a comic book Isaiah got from Adam's dad. How freaking adorable is that?! If that isn't just the most delightfully nerdy meet cute, I don't know what is. And I watch a lot of Hallmark Christmas movies.

I can't believe they've been together for almost a year. Their one year anniversary is next month on the 17th. And I've officially known for a day.

Considering Kyle has been coming over for weekly dinners almost as long, I'm willing to admit my observational skills as a mother *could* be better.

Kyle is such a great kid, too.

I mean, I obviously think Isaiah is a great kid, but Kyle surprised us.

He said please and thank you, and helped clear the table. He put his phone down and made eye contact with us. I think the biggest thing to me was how he interacted with Adam. Especially after finding out he was a pastor.

Instead of running in the other direction or changing the subject like literally everyone else we come in contact with outside of the church, Kyle started asking questions. And deep ones at that—like about different faiths and death and grief and heaven. Considering Kyle's dad and Adam's father both passed away around the same time, I'm not surprised they found a lot to talk about. I don't know all of what they discussed, but I just know it started by cutting into Isaiah and Kyle's Halo time and ended with Adam baptizing Kyle a few months ago.

When Isaiah came out, I sat like Kyle had with Adam, and I listened. Really listened.

Isaiah told me Kyle is the David to his Jonathan. I admit, it's not a part of the Bible I've studied extensively, but my son has apparently spent hours pouring over these particular portions of Scripture—especially in the weeks leading up to him talking with me. He talked about Jonathon and David's beautiful friendship, how Jonathon risked his life to save David, and how David loved Jonathan in a way he never loved a woman (including his wife, who happened to be Jonathon's sister...which, just has a lot of layers to it. But I digress). These two men trusted each other so deeply, that despite everything that was against them, they found connection and understanding in each other. Isaiah also talked about Jonathon's dad, King Saul, and how Saul couldn't stand David, hated David, wanted David dead. How Isaiah worried that Adam would now act like King Saul.

That Adam couldn't stand Kyle now, that Adam hated Kyle now, that Adam might wish Kyle were...

Is this the legacy of Christians?

That we believe some aren't worth saving? That Christ's command to "love one another" disappears when it can't be extended to someone of our own church, synod, or belief system? Who even are God's people? "For God so loved the world..." Your children aren't just white, American-Lutheran suburbanites. Your children are Black. Your children are queer. Your children are homeless, they're scared teenagers, they're immigrants, they're **gasp** Democrats.

Why is it so hard for us to see that?

And what are we teaching our children?

That God loves them no matter what? That because they are a child of God, no hardship or heartache will ever befall them? That Christians are the most loving, supportive network and community a child could wish for, and that they will never turn their backs on them?

Because that's not what I see in the comments on Facebook or in the various laws that are trying to be passed around the country. That's not what I see in the emails to my husband, telling him he shouldn't watch the game tonight because the players are protesting during the national anthem again. That's not what I see, when friends say they're being actively persecuted in this country, but then actively ignore children being gunned down in schools or thrown into literal cages.

Why do we act like club bouncers with exclusive VIP lists, who get to decide who calls this beautiful church their home?

Because last I checked, we aren't in charge of the list.

You are.

...I really don't know what to do. I feel torn. On the one hand, I see the wedding ring my husband gave me in a church almost 16 years ago, where I was a bride who believed love could only exist between a man and a woman. But on the other hand, I see the hand that has held my son, where as a mother I can't deny the love those two have for each other. Frankly, it's beautiful.

You made Kyle and you made Isaiah.

You knew how they would turn out and You knew that they would meet and fall in love.

And You know what exactly happened between Jonathon and David, despite what the Bible does or doesn't say.

And You know what I'm going to do after tonight, even if I don't. Yet.

(A beat. Sara wanders a moment, humming "God Help the Outcasts. She stops.)

Huh. I never know how to wrap up a prayer. Adam is so good at it. But when I pray in church or before bed, or even when I'm alone with nothing but a bottle of wine—I get three fourths of the way through, and...nothing. Sure, I could hastily thrown in some classic prayer cliches, followed by a "in your name we ask this, Amen."...but I don't want to do that tonight.

Truth is, I'm mad. At the situation, at my son—not for being gay, just...for not feeling like he could tell me the truth. I'm also mad at Adam, because if he wasn't a pastor this wouldn't run the risk of blowing up our life. And I'm mad that my son loving another boy has the power to even do that. And, to be honest? I'm mad at You, too.

Because I trusted You.

I prayed to You.

I asked You to protect our family, and to bless us with good health, and to take care of us. Even when the bills were piling up and we were getting behind on the church's mortgage—You found a way to provide. Even when I was in the hospital, scared to death of losing my husband as they pumped his stomach—You found a way to give him strength. Even when I miscarried again and again and again— You helped heal my heart around the grief.

And to thank you, I've tried to do everything right: I sing in the choir, I go to church every Sunday, I listen intently as my husband preaches. I coordinate dinners for Lent and bring new parents welcome baskets and visit our elderly members whose own families have forgotten them. I try so damn hard to be not just a good person, but a good pastor's wife.

And it is fucking *exhausting* keeping that up.

So please—why, God? Why this? And don't give me any of that shit we're told to peddle about "nothing we can't handle." I AM AT MY LIMIT. Please.

(a beat, then softer)

Please.

(another beat. Sara looks up, then spots something—a hardcover Bible. She goes to pick it up.)

Okay, how about this? I'm going to flip open this book, and You're going to tell me exactly what I need to hear and how we are going to handle this, okay? If You can part the Red Sea and cure leprosy and bring people back from the freaking dead, I think you can do a little God-magic and make an exception and speak to me directly through this. Deal? Deal.

(Sara takes a big swig from her bottle of wine. And then another.)

Alright. Let's do this.

(Sara holds the Bible in her hands. She closes her eyes. Deep breath. Sara holds the book out in front of her with one hand. She lets her palm go flat, and the book flops open. Sara peeks, and then opens her eyes. She pulls the Bible close to her, and reads. She gasps, and then begins to cry. Tears of joy or fear, we don't know. Sara wipes her eyes with her shirt sleeve, and clears her throat. She leans, and produces a wine cork from her back pocket. She re-corks her wine bottle. She then stands up, holding the Bible close to her chest with one hand, and casually grabs the wine bottle with the other. She breathes in deeply, and then out. In, and out. She begins to walk off stage, and as she does, she begins to sing.)

If you but trust in God to guide you,

And place your confidence in Him,

(She exits stage right, but she continues to sing off stage and finishes the verse.)

You'll find Him always there beside you

To give you hope and strength within;

For those who trust God's changeless love

Build on the Rock that will not move.

(Blackout.)