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In Church

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In Church

Sean P. Schickedanz

IN CHURCH, MY TEENAGE DAUGHTER ROLLS her wet Blow Pop on the exposed section of my leg, the white blotch between my sock and my pants.

Sticky, sticky, sticky, she says.

I have been trying to tell her recently, Get some friends, do something. She watches TV like others take valium.

Stop it already, I tell her.

Wes Williams speaks to the congregation. He's a leader, a real "capo": he wears a beard, he imparts wisdom. He sings, he dances. I know his name because it is spelled out in the program.

My daughter and I sit in the back; we create our kingdom. I let her rule the right side, keeping the left side for myself. Before people stand to speak, I grant them permission.

I rarely deny them.

Wes stands still, but he hovers, too. He looks off-balance. He speaks precisely, slowly.

Good book, he says. This is a good book. He holds up a black hardback.

I lean forward to see the book. I have been looking for a good book.

Wes slaps the book down on the podium, then reaches below and comes up with another black book.

Good book, he says. Irreplaceable.

My subjects look on silently, without passion. They are not unruly. Wes puts the book next to the first one. He goes for another.

One hell of a book, he says, raising it high. Serious literature. I want more, more of this.

Tell me now, really, Wes goes on, Has anyone here ever read a better book? He asks the question, a real question. He searches for lusty willingness.

Angels with halos and wings with sequins zip about the room, perching on organ pipes and singing heavenly tunes.

The spirit is with them.

Religious. Religious fervor is all my daughter can say.

A hand shoots up, confident. Then a voice: soft, mild. Unclear.

What? Wes says.

Where the Wild Things Are, she says. *Where the Wild Things Are* is a better book. Max is great. I believe in it.

She has children.

Wes says, Well, now.

A man on the dais leans over to counsel with the elders. I read his lips.

He says, Yo. What's up?

Wes reaches down and gets an armful of black books.

Hellacious book, he says. Should be a *New York Times* best-seller. He tosses one to the woman with children. Read it, he says.

He scatters five copies into the first few rows. Flip, flip, flip. Catch, he says.

I have seen filmstrips of what to do. I stand up and declare loudly, from way down low, from the murky bottom of my soul where only neon-eyed intuitive fish lurk, I BELIEVE.

Wes looks and looks at me. His look washes over my body: from head to toe I am just knowing. A big smile spreads across his lips like syrup through a pancake.

He heaves a book at me. I watch pages flutter; I hear them crack, as the cover opens in midair.