

Rooted in the Shadow by Dineen Miller

Synopsis

Aspiring artist, **Sarah Ashbury**, walked away from her faith two years ago when her mother died. Her emotional shut down hinders the thing she loves doing the most—painting.

David Bristow put aside his love for Sarah when she turned away from God. He struggles to keep his feelings in check and stands firm in his support of her. Ultimately, David learns he must let Sarah go and trust in the God he holds so dear.

At her father's funeral, Sarah watches a total stranger give David an envelope. He goes to Ben Wellaby, a family friend, looking for answers. After Ben confirms the documents are genuine, David tells Sarah the man she grew up with isn't really her father. Sarah feels lost and abandoned.

Ben tells Sarah her birth father, Mitchell Fords, was driven to have a son and heir. Mitchell ended his marriage to Sarah's mother to marry his mistress. In need of answers, Sarah decides to search for Mitchell Fords. David realizes has no other choice but to release her to God and trust in His plan.

Sarah goes to Manhattan, where she meets Rebecca and Peter Fords, the wife and son of her birth father. Rebecca tells Sarah her father died sixteen years ago, and implies Sarah's mother had been unfaithful to Mitchell Fords. Sarah is heartbroken but is drawn to David when he comes to her hotel. Seeing Sarah so vulnerable creates an inner struggle for David as his feelings for her intensify.

When Peter shows up at Sarah's hotel door, David recognizes him as the stranger from the cemetery and is shocked when Sarah tells him Peter is her brother. Peter affirms his desire to know Sarah, then expresses his suspicions that his mother may have played a sinister part in their father's death. Peter leaves the hotel and confronts J.J., the man hired by his mother to spy on Sarah.

Excited over a new painting assignment, Sarah comes to David's apartment to share her news. Again, she is drawn to David, and they kiss for the first time. Although David is elated about this new development, he needs to know if Sarah is sure she wants more than a friendship. The discussion turns to faith, which angers her.

As doubts continue to plague Sarah, she seeks out Ben's wife, June. Overwhelmed by her suspicions, Sarah flees before June can explain. Ben comes to see Sarah and affirms her hope that Rebecca Fords lied about her mother's infidelity.

Peter arrives with the name of a doctor who can tell them more about what happened to their father. Sarah agrees to go with Peter to look for Dr. Milton and asks David to come with her. David tails Peter, who meets a shady man David recognizes from one of Sarah's random street sketches. David confronts Peter.

Sarah meets a police detective, who introduces himself as J.J. David and Peter tell her J.J. has been tailing her. Dr. Milton discloses to them how he helped Rebecca institutionalize Mitchell Fords in a facility in Switzerland. The doctor reveals that Mitchell Fords is still alive but very ill. When Sarah and Peter decide to rescue their father, David agrees to accompany them. Dr. Milton says he will make the arrangements and meet them at the Swiss facility, then calls Rebecca and tries to blackmail her for more money.

On the way to the institution, a speeding car is heading directly at Sarah. David's attempt to save her hurtles them both into the path of an oncoming tram. Peter sees the driver of the speeding car is J.J. David is injured from the fall and is taken to the hospital.

At the hospital, Sarah stands vigil over David, who is unconscious with a concussion. Her burden of responsibility leads her to the revelation that God, her heavenly Father, has never stopped loving her. She also sees her feelings for David have grown beyond friendship and hopes it's not too late to tell him.

Alone, David regains consciousness. He knows now he can't walk away from his feelings for Sarah. When she comes into his room, unhurt, David is relieved, then surprised when she kisses him.

Peter arrives with the news that Mitchell Fords is missing, and so is Dr. Milton. Sarah and Peter go back to the hotel and discover a ransom note from Dr. Milton. Peter makes the arrangements

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Comment: I would add a sentence here to set up the story. Something like: "...most—painting. Now that her father has also left her, Sarah's need for roots leads her on a dangerous quest for a family she never knew she had." Or something like that. Just to set up the storyline.

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Comment: If he "released her to God and trusted in His plan" (previous paragraph), why is David in Manhattan? You might need to explain his motivations here.

Comment: Sarah didn't recognize Peter from the cemetery when she met him and Rebecca?

Comment: You might need a short sentence to explain Peter's motivations for helping Sarah, since most people would assume he'd have some type of loyalty to his mother.

Comment: Assignment or job? Commission?

Comment: I thought the reason David can't have a relationship with Sarah is because she turned away from God? If that's the case, wouldn't he back off because she still hasn't re-embraced her faith?

Comment: This sentence didn't quite make sense to me. I can't logically understand Sarah going to June but being so emotionally overwhelmed that she leaves before she gets the answers she came for.

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Comment: You might want to show the connection between these two realizations more, like tying God's love to David's love or something like that. You also might want to explain her grief and struggles and how that ties with the concept of how God never stops loving her, so that a non-Christian would better understand the connection.

to meet the doctor's demands, while Sarah returns to the hospital to stay with David.

Dr. Milton confesses he didn't take Mitchell and implies Peter's mother is responsible. Peter pushes the doctor for more information and is reminded of the family's farmhouse near the city.

As David is being released from the hospital, Sarah goes to meet Peter downstairs. In the elevator, Sarah recognizes J.J. He pulls out a gun and takes her to the farmhouse. When Sarah tries to escape, J.J. recaptures her and brings her to Mitchell, who is slumped over in a wheelchair, unconscious.

Peter gets a call from J.J., who states he has not only Mitchell but Sarah, too. David and Peter race to the farmhouse and call the police on the way.

Rebecca rushes out of her Zürich hotel after receiving a strange phone call from J.J., insisting she come to the family farmhouse. She frets over her carefully laid plans.

David storms into the farmhouse but is stopped by J.J., who orders Peter to push Mitchell's wheelchair into the room. Rebecca arrives and is "invited" by J.J. to join them and calls her "Mother." Rebecca confirms J.J. is her son and confesses to her part in institutionalizing Mitchell. When sirens are heard, J.J. grabs Sarah. David struggles with J.J. for the gun. A gunshot rings out. J.J. lays lifeless, shot by the police. Rebecca crouches by his body and talks to her dead son as if he were a child.

An ambulance takes Mitchell Fords, who's in severe diabetic shock, to the hospital. He regains consciousness and asks Sarah for forgiveness. He dies shortly after. David finds Sarah in the hospital chapel, sad but at peace.

Ironically, Rebecca's mental breakdown lands her in the very same institution. Peter goes back to Manhattan with the plan of restoring the family name.

Back home, David arrives at Sarah's door with a bouquet of yellow roses. In the center is a single red rose with an engagement ring attached. Sarah happily accepts his proposal, joyful in the promise of a future with the man she loves and her renewed faith.

Epilogue: Eighteen Months Later. Peter opens an unrecognizable e-mail and the single line of the message stuns him. *Did you forget about Mitchell's pregnant mistress?*

Comment: You might need to explain J.J.'s motives for doing this. Does he have a breakdown? Anger at Rebecca? And why kidnap them, why not just kill them and escape? Why bring them all to the farmhouse?

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Comment: Great ending hook!

You do a good job shortening the long synopsis while keeping the plot points and the spiritual threads. You could even add more that would flesh out the characters' motivations more.

You might want to include more about how Rebecca is the one orchestrating the action here. It seems more that J.J. is doing everything on his own, and Rebecca seems like a peripheral character. Explain her involvement a little more.

Does David have an external goal? I know that Sarah does, and Peter does also, but David doesn't seem to have a specific action he's taking besides watching over Sarah. He has a great deal of internal conflict, but I think that it would give more depth to his character if he had more of a prominent external goal for the story. (Or maybe he does, but it's just not in the synopsis.) This is something the judges in the contest will be looking for.

In regards to his internal conflict, what does he learn during the course of his emotional arc? He realizes that he can't live without Sarah, but what personal internal lesson does he learn? That probably should be apparent in the synopsis.

One thing that I noticed about Sarah's external goal—she isn't always actively pursuing it, at least according to the synopsis. After going to Manhattan, it seems she tends to just go where Peter tells her to. You might want to make her actions more active in pursuit of the truth, so she isn't just blown about by the things that happen around her, she should be actively working toward her own quest for answers.

Also, the climax should have a point of sacrifice or decision for Sarah. This proves to the reader that she deserves her happy ending. From the time J.J. kidnaps her, she simply reacts to everything that happens to her. At the climax, she should actively choose or do something to show her strength, to show she truly learned the realization in the hospital while watching over David. Then, when the police come in and shoot him, Sarah's happy ending—or at least her safety—resonates more with the reader because she has already proven to the reader that she's a character deserving of that happy ending.

You do a good job showing the romantic thread in this synopsis. You might want to also show more clearly Sarah's changing feelings for David—what she's thinking about being “drawn to him.” She comes into the realization she loves him rather suddenly, and you might need a sentence earlier to show the start of her romantic feelings for him, why she's so drawn to him.

Your ending is excellent. All the other story threads have been tied up so there's no unresolved issues plaguing the reader. When you insert the tantalizing mystery for the sequel, it's intriguing but not too frustrating or dissonant, because all the other threads are already tied up.

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