

The Shack

Plot Synopsis

The protagonist, Mack, is a middle-aged man, husband, and father, whose youngest daughter was abducted and murdered by a serial killer four years before. He is in the midst of what he calls “The Great Sadness.”

The narrator, Willie, is Mack’s friend and neighbor who agrees to tell Mack’s story, which is “a little, well no, it is a *lot* on the fantastic side” (p. 12, emphasis in original).

Mack receives a note in his mailbox inviting him to the shack in the woods where his daughter was presumed murdered. The invitation comes from “Papa,” the term that Mack’s wife uses for God. After feeling anger at being the butt of a cruel prank and then fear at possibly being taunted by his daughter’s killer, curiosity wins and Mack heads for the shack.

At the shack, Mack meets God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. God is an African American woman called Papa, Jesus is a Middle Eastern man with a tool belt, and the Holy Spirit is a shimmering woman called Sarayu.

Mack spends a weekend being cared for and comforted by all three while he asks them questions a man in pain would like to ask of his higher power. Two main themes of his questions involve the murder of his young daughter and the abuse he suffered at the hands of his own alcoholic father.

Mack finds healing and forgiveness at the shack, and is also led to the location of his daughter’s body. When Mack is on his way home, he is in a near-fatal car accident. He awakes from the crash and finds that the chronology of his last few days is off. The time he thought he had spent at the shack did not really exist. He is moved to tell his wife, family, and friends about his experience, and they believe that something profound indeed happened to him. He is also able to lead the police to his daughter’s remains and evidence that eventually helps them catch and convict the serial murderer responsible. This last feat may be what convinces his loved ones that he has had a profound spiritual experience rather than merely a confused concussion.