

The Rapture Game by Catherine LaFleur and James Bauhaus

(Soundtrack: One of Us by Joan Osborne)

"Will you accept the Mark of the Beast?"

Tiffany, my captor, hisses in my ear with a spit soaked whisper as she twists my arm behind my back. Her minion, Bitsy, stands by with a sharpie poised to ink 666 on my forehead.

I spent my childhood enmeshed in an evangelical Christian religious cult. The adults forbade us to watch worldly TV or movies. Instead of Little House on the Prairie or Dumbo, we got Davy and Goliath or 1970's pot boilers about the end of the world. Davy got into innocent misadventures with his dog, Goliath.

BORING!

The coming Apocalypse held us breathless. Those movies were filled with the terror of children who rejected Jesus and were left behind. Imagine a world where Mom and Dad disappear. Empty clothes lie collapsed like chalk outlines at a crime scene. Once they were filled with friends and family, now, gone in the blink of an eye. The children are doomed to face Satan, a.k.a. The Antichrist.

Plagues and war cause food and water shortages. Accepting the Mark of the Beast, a 666 tattooed on hand or forehead, is the only way to survive. Those who refuse the mark face a gory execution by guillotine, hanging, or firing squad.

We were thrilled!

We were terrified!

We wanted to know who among us could be forced to take the 666.

Instead of playing games imagining ourselves as doctors, teachers, or business owners, we enacted trials. In the roles of the police, lawyers, and judges, we each tried to force the righteous defendant to deny Jesus.

Torture?

Sure, we engaged in kid torture!

On the girl's playground, we lined up to administer face slaps, hair pulling, and hard pinches. The victim was held down while another girl drew the abominable 666 on her hand or forehead in indelible ink.

Proud am I to tell you I have been both the marked and the girl administering the mark.

Sometimes, I wonder if my feelings about religion would be less negative if my parents raised me Catholic.

This leads me, as it so often does, to wonder what James would say about this. Let's find out.

" Thanks, Catherine. I'm happy to oblige."

"Tell me about growing up Catholic, James."

"My mom made all us kids Catholic. When I asked her why, she blamed the idea on my eldest brother Paul. It's strange because he never seemed that religious."

"True or not, I suffered an HOUR of church every Sunday morning. In elementary school, we had short bible studies three times a week. Sermons and stories were interesting until they repeated too often. They were filled with incredible details like the sea parting, fire falling from the skies, and astounding healings. Faith is difficult to maintain without proof."

"My troubles began with a rack of Encyclopedia Britannica in the back of every homeroom. By sixth grade, I read them all. My child-like belief faded in the face of hard facts. It eroded away completely by my twenties."

"Age brings both wisdom and desperation. Although it's thin, my faith has returned to me. As a kid, no cheap thrill was too dangerous. I never thought about death."

"Now a time limit looms."

"I say faith remains because it gives me ethics aside from and greater than mere patriotism. My belief in Justice and the State was eaten as if by a gabbles of vultures tearing at a corpse. My Catholicism is reduced to the Golden Rule."

"Catholics are famous for charity. My life has depended on charity more than it's total value. At times, I've been desperate for boots, blanket, and a bike for survival. I managed to survive both and prosper a little."

"Paying it forward and making the world a better place than I found it is how I live my life."

"Why are you looking at me like that, Catherine?"

"That's quite a trick, James, not what I was expecting."

"I save all my best tricks for you, flower."

"Okay, you win this round. This is a good story and you made me feel something."

"Want to feel something else?"

(.....)

(.....)

"Oh, James!"