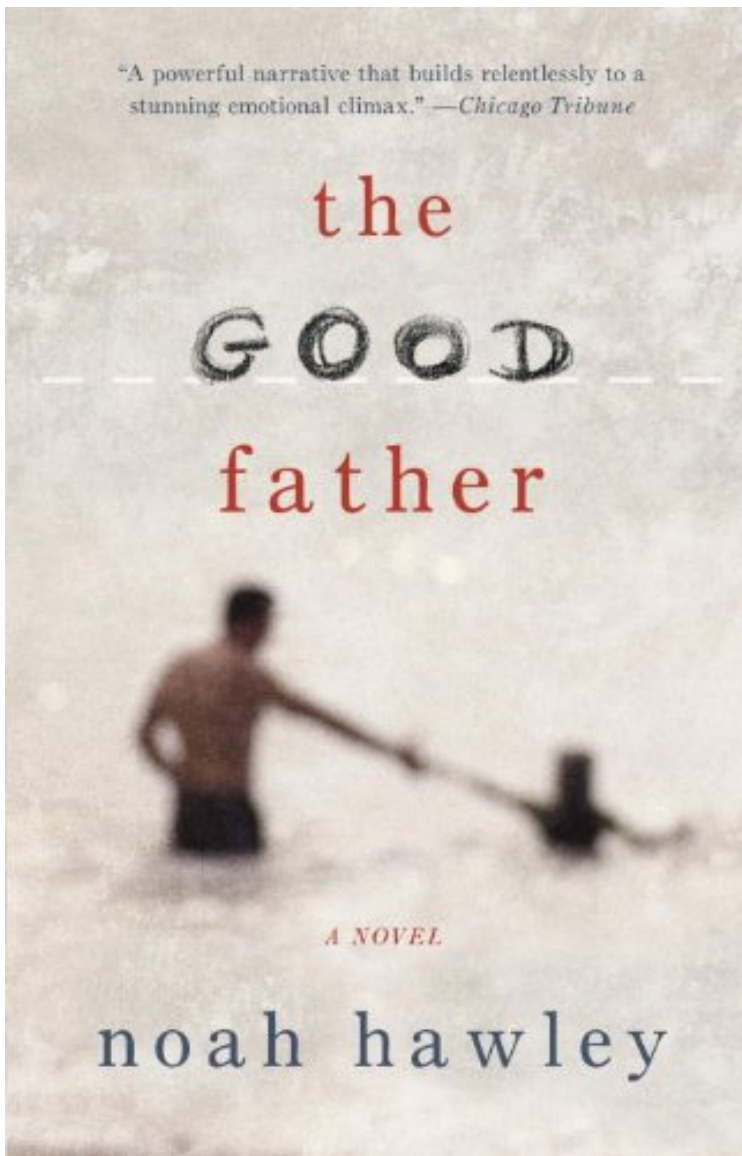


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The Good Father



Par Noah Hawley
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the award-winning creator of the TV show Fargo and author of thebestsellerBefore the Fall, an intense, psychological novel about one doctor's suspense-filled quest to unlock the mind of a suspected political assassin: his twenty-year old son. As the Chief of Rheumatology at Columbia Presbyterian, Dr. Paul Allen's specialty is diagnosing patients with conflicting symptoms, patients other doctors have given up on. He lives a contented life in Westport with his second wife and their twin sonshard won after a failed marriage earlier in his career that produced a son named Daniel. In the harrowing opening scene of this provocative and affecting novel, Dr. Allen is home with his family when a televised news report announces that the Democratic candidate for president has been shot at a rally, and Daniel is

caught on video as the assassin. Daniel Allen has always been a good kid, a decent student, popular but, as a child of divorce, used to shuttling back and forth between parents, he is also something of a drifter. Which may be why, at the age of nineteen, he quietly drops out of Vassar and begins an aimless journey across the United States, during which he sheds his former skin and eventually even changes his name to Carter Allen

Cash. Told alternately from the point of view of the guilt-ridden, determined father and his meandering, ruminative son, *The Good Father* is a powerfully emotional page-turner that keeps one guessing until the very end. This is an absorbing and honest novel about the responsibilities and limitations of being a parent and our capacity to provide our children with unconditional love in the face of an unthinkable situation. From

the Hardcover edition. Excerpt One Home Thursday night was pizza night in the Allen household. My last appointment of the day was scheduled for eleven a.m., and at three o'clock I would ride the train home to

Westport, thumbing through patient charts and returning phone calls. I liked to watch the city recede, the brick buildings of the Bronx falling away on the side of the tracks. Trees sprang up slowly, sunlight bursting forth in triumph, like cheers at the end of a long, oppressive regime. The canyon became a valley. The valley

became a field. Riding the train I felt myself expand, as if I had escaped a fate I thought inevitable. It was odd to me, having grown up in New York City, a child of concrete and asphalt. But over the decades I had found the right angles and constant siren blare to be crushing. So ten years earlier I had moved my family to Westport, Connecticut, where we became a suburban family with suburban family hopes and dreams. I was a

rheumatologist--the chief of rheumatology at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan. It was a specialty that most people didn't recognize, concerned they'd guess with the watery eyes and phlegmy cough of a bad pollen allergy. But in truth, rheumatology is a subspecialty of internal medicine and pediatrics. The

term "rheumatology" originates from the Greek word *rheuma*, meaning "that which flows as a river or stream" and the suffix *-ology*, meaning "the study of." Rheumatologists mainly deal with clinical problems involving joints, soft tissues, and allied conditions of connective tissues. We are often the doctor of last

resort when patients develop mysterious symptoms involving most of the body's systems: nervous, respiratory, circulatory. The rheumatologist is called to consult when a diagnosis remains elusive. I was a

diagnostician by trade, a medical detective, analyzing symptoms and test results, looking for the most pernicious diseases and intangible traumas. After eighteen years I still found the work fascinating and often took it to bed with me, mulling patient histories in the slippery moments before sleep, looking for patterns in the grain. June 16 was a sunny day, not too hot but with the threat of New York summer in the air. You could

smell the first wisp of humidity rising off the macadam. Soon any breeze would feel like the hot breath of a stranger. Soon you would be able to reach up and smudge car exhaust across the sky like oil paint. But for now there was just the threat, a slight smother, a trickle in the armpits. I was late getting home that night.

Afternoon rounds had taken longer than expected, and I didn't step off the train until close to six. I walked the nine blocks to our house through rows of manicured lawns. American flags hung from mailboxes. White picket fences, at once welcoming and prohibitive, ran beside me like the sprockets of a bicycle wheel, half

seen from the corner of my eye. A sense of motion, of one thing being ticked off, then another. It was a town of affluence, and I was one of its citizens, a medical expert, a lecturing professor at Columbia. I had become an MD in the era before the HMO, before the nickel-and-dime of doctors, and I had done well for myself.

The money afforded certain freedoms and luxuries. A four-bedroom house, a few acres of hilly land with a weeping willow and a faded white hammock that swung lazily in the breeze. On these early evenings when the weather was warm I walked through the suburban quiet with a sense of peace, a feeling of

accomplishment, not smug or petty but deep-seated and human. It was the triumph of a marathoner after a race, the jubilation of a soldier after a long war is over. A challenge had been faced and overcome, and you were better, wiser for the facing. Fran was already working the dough when I walked in the door, rolling it

out against the marble countertop. The twins were grating cheese and scattering toppings. Fran was my second wife, a tall redhead, with the slow curves of a lazy river. Turning forty had changed the quality of her

beauty from the athletic glow of a volleyball player to a languid voluptuousness. Contemplative and sure-footed, Fran was a woman who thought things through, who took a long-term approach to problems. These were not qualities my first wife shared, prone as she was to impulse and the full roller coaster of emotion.

But I like to think that one of my better qualities is that I learn from my mistakes. And that, when I asked Fran to marry me, it was because we were--for lack of a more romantic word--compatible in the truest sense of the word. Fran was a virtual assistant, which meant she worked from home, helping people she'd never

met schedule appointments and make flight reservations. Instead of earrings, Fran wore a Bluetooth earpiece, which she put in when she awoke and didn't remove until just before bed. This meant she spent

large portions of every day conducting what appeared to be a long conversation with herself. The twins, Alex and Wally, were ten that year. They were fraternal and not in any way similar. Wally had a harelip and a slight air of menace about him, like a boy who is just waiting for you to turn your back. In truth, he was the sweeter of the two, the more innocent. A miscoded gene had given him a cleft palate, and though surgery had mostly corrected it, there was still a quality to his face that seemed off-kilter, imprecise, vulnerable. His twin, Alex, fair-haired, comparatively angelic looking, had gotten into some trouble recently for fighting. It was a familiar problem for him, starting in the sandbox era as a willingness to battle anyone who made fun of his brother. But over the years, that instinct to protect had evolved into an irresistible need to champion the underdog--fat kids, nerds, kids with braces. A few months back--after being called to the principal's office for the third time that semester--Fran and I took Alex to lunch and explained to him that while we approved of his instinct to protect the meek, he would have to find less physical ways to do so. "If you want these bullies to learn a lesson," I said, "you have to teach them something. And I guarantee, violence never taught anybody anything." Alex had always had a quick wit and a sharp tongue. I suggested he sign up for debate classes, where he could learn to beat his opponents with words. He shrugged, but I could tell he liked the idea. And over the next few months, Alex became the top debater in his class. Now he turned every request to eat his vegetables or help with the chores into an Aristotelian *voir dire*. I had no one to blame but myself. This was our nuclear family. A father, a mother, and two sons. Daniel, the son from my first marriage, had lived with us for a year during his sullen teens, but had departed as impulsively as he'd arrived, waking me one morning before dawn to ask if I could drive him to the airport. His mother and I had split when he was seven, and he had stayed with her on the West Coast when I had come east. Three years after his brief stay with us, Danny, eighteen, had started college. But he dropped out after less than a year, climbing into his car and heading west. Later, he would say that he just wanted to "see the country." He didn't tell us he'd left. Instead, I sent a card to his dorm, and it came back unopened, with a stamp occupant no longer at this address. This had been his way since childhood. Danny was a boy who never stayed where you left him, who popped up in unexpected places at unexpected times. Now he called infrequently; sent e-mails from Internet cafes in the flat states of the Midwest. The occasional postcard scrawled in a moment of summer nostalgia. But always at his convenience, not mine. The last time I saw him was in Arizona. I'd flown in for a medical conference. Daniel was passing through on his way north. I bought him breakfast in a hipster coffee shop near my hotel. His hair was long and he ate his pancakes without pause, his fork moving from plate to mouth like a steam shovel. He told me he'd been doing a lot of camping in the Southwest. During the day he hiked. At night he read by flashlight. He seemed happy. When you're young there is no more romantic conceit than freedom--the boundless certainty that you can go anywhere, do anything. And though it still bothered me that he had dropped out of college six months earlier, knowing him as I did, I can't say I was surprised. Daniel had grown up traveling. He was a teenage gypsy, shuttled between Connecticut and California, living partly with me and partly with his mother. Children of joint custody are, by nature of the divorce settlement, independent. All those Christmases spent in airports, all those summer vacations shuffling back and forth between mom and dad. Unaccompanied minors, crisscrossing the nation. Daniel seemed to survive it without major trauma, but I still worried, the way any parent does. Not enough to keep me up at night, but enough to add a layer of doubt to each day, a nagging sense of loss, like something important had been misplaced. And yet he had always been self-sufficient, and he was a smart, likable kid, so I convinced myself that wherever he went, he was fine. Last fall, sitting across from each other in that Arizona coffee shop, Daniel teased me about my coat and tie. It was Saturday, and he said he didn't see the point. "It's a medical conference," I told him. "I have a professional reputation to uphold." He laughed at the thought of it. To him all these grown men and women acting and dressing in a manner that society deemed "professional" was ridiculous. When we parted I tried to give him five hundred dollars, but he wouldn't take it. He said he was doing good, working odd jobs here and there. He said it would feel strange carrying that much money around with him. "It'd throw off the balance, you know?" The hug he gave me when we parted was full-bodied and long. His hair smelled unwashed, the sweet musk of the hobo. I asked him if he was sure about the money. He just smiled. I watched him walk away with a deep feeling of impotence. He was my son and I had lost control of him, if I'd ever really had it. I was a bystander now, an observer, watching his life from the sidelines. When he reached the corner, Daniel turned and waved. I waved back. Then he stepped into the street and I lost him in the crowd. I hadn't seen him since. Now, in the kitchen of our Connecticut home, Fran came over and kissed me on the mouth. Her hands were covered in flour and she held them up the way I had held mine up a few hours ago walking into the ICU. "Alex got in

another fight," she said. "It wasn't a fight," Alex corrected her. "A fight is where you hit someone and they hit back. This was more like a mugging." "Mr. Smart Ass has been suspended for three days," she told me. "I plan on being furious," I told them. "After I have a drink." I took a beer from the fridge. Fran had returned to the pizza stone. "We figured pepperoni and mushroom tonight," she said. "Far be it from me," I told her. Apropos of nothing Fran said, "Yes, the seven-fifteen flight to Tucson." Tucson? Then I noticed the blue light. "Yes, he'll need a car." I started to speak, but she held up a finger. "That sounds great. Will you e-mail me the itinerary? Thank you." The blue light went off. The finger came down. "What can I do?" I said. "Set the table. And I'll need you to take it out in ten minutes. That oven still scares me." The TV was on in the corner, playing Jeopardy! It was another ritual in our house, this watching of game shows. Fran thought it was good for the kids to compete with contestants on TV. I had never understood why. But every night around seven our house became a cacophony of barked non sequiturs. "James Garfield," said Wally. "Madison," corrected Fran. "In the form of a question," said Alex. "Who is James Garfield?" said Wally. "Madison," said Fran. "Who is James Madison?" I had gotten used to the nightly confusion, looked forward to it. Families are defined by their routines. The pickups and drop-offs. The soccer games and debate clubs, doctors' appointments and field trips. Every night you eat and clean. You check to make sure homework is done. You turn off the lights and lock the doors. On Thursdays you drag the Toters to the curb. Friday mornings you bring them in. After a few years, even the arguments are the same, as if you are living out the same day over and over. There is comfort in this, even as it drives you mad. As a virtual assistant, Fran was militant about order. We were her family, but also her ground force. She sent us e-mails and text messages almost hourly, updating calendar events in real time. The dentist appointment has been rescheduled. Glee club has been replaced by ice-skating. Armies are less regimented. Twice a week in the Allen household we synchronized our watches like a special-ops team tasked with blowing up a bridge. The occasional annoyance this raised in me was tempered by love. To have married once and failed is to realize who you are in some deep and unromanticized way. The veneer of personal embarrassment about your weaknesses and idiosyncrasies is lifted, and you are then free to marry the person who best complements the real you, not the idealized version of you that lives in your head. This is what led me to Fran after eight years of marriage to Ellen Shapiro. Though I had long thought of myself as a spontaneous and open person, I realized after my marriage to Ellen fell apart that I was, in fact, a creature of rigidity and repetition. I cannot stand living with uncertainty and forgetfulness. The bright-eyed, hippie ditziness that seemed charming in Ellen at first glance quickly became infuriating. Similarly, all the qualities that made me a good doctor--my meticulousness, my love of redundancy, the long hours I worked--proved to be qualities that Ellen found oppressive and dull. We took to fighting at every opportunity. It wasn't so much what I did or what she did. It was who we were. And the disappointment we voiced to each other was disappointment in ourselves for making such poor choices. This is the learning process. And though our marriage produced Daniel, it was a union best dissolved before any real damage was done. *Revue de presse* Brilliant and heartbreaking, *The Good Father* is a thriller, a mystery and above all else a savagely contemporary, hugely important story . . . it will haunt the reader for a long time. (Tony Parsons) It is rare that a novel so considered is also so gripping. Intense and utterly humane, *THE GOOD FATHER* is a book, the moment you finish it, you just know you will want to read again. A tremendous achievement. (Simon Lelic) Riveting, moving, unique. This novel deserves to become a classic. (Sophie Hannah) I read *THE GOOD FATHER* into the small hours. It is that rare gem: a genuine literary thriller, as deep as it is wide. A beautiful, moving and important novel. (Erin Kelly, author of *The Poison Tree*) An unblinking look at the ills of modern America, and a conclusion: love might address them in a way that wealth cannot. (Justin Webb, presenter of the Today programme on BBC Radio 4) An examination of conspiracy theories and political assassinations. (Mark Billingham) Noah Hawley's flawless writing and staggeringly impressive narrative authority make *THE GOOD FATHER* so harrowingly plausible . . . a memorable, moving and unputdownable masterpiece. (Sunday Express) To what extent can a father's actions mess up his child's life? How responsible is a parent when their child does something really wrong? These are the questions posed by the American author Noah Hawley's gripping new novel, *THE GOOD FATHER*, and perhaps it is because these questions feel particularly relevant now that the novel has struck such a chord. (The Sunday Times Style magazine) This debut . . . explodes like a hand grenade with a force that drives the breath from your body. But, like every great story, it starts from a simple premise - what if your son assassinated a presidential candidate in the United States? Could you believe it? Would you blame yourself? . . . This isn't only a forensic examination of modern fatherhood; it's also a brutal attack on U.S. gun culture, and a reflection on the country's appetite for assassination. Haunting,

terrible and yet utterly real, it's superbly written with a marvellous feel for the American landscape and its soul. It's also a tantalising thriller. (Daily Mail)THE GOOD FATHER packs [a] considerable emotional punch. Not as a harrowing investigation of evil, a critique of gun violence in America or a guide to good parenting, but as an account of a father finally accepting his child, for better or worse, until death do them part. Male readers: get your hankies at the ready. (Independent on Sunday)This is something different: edgy and confrontational in its treatment of the devastating effects of America's gun culture but shot through with real emotional heft and featuring characters it is impossible not to care about . . . powerful, involving and full of provocative invective. (Daily Express)Timely and unsettling . . . [a] curious but beguiling mixture of fact and fiction (Telegraph)Gripping . . . echoes Don DeLillo (The Sunday Times)An agonizing but irresistible look into the souls of a killer and a man who always thought he was a good, or good enough, father. (Wall Street Journal)Tackles the theme of parental soul-searching in the face of a child's arrest for a criminal . . . a powerful narrative that builds relentlessly to a stunning emotional climax. (Chicago Tribune)An exploration of the anxieties and challenges of parenthood, the flimsy grasp we have on our pasts when it most counts, and, ultimately, the extent to which our characters and fates are shaped by nature, nurture and chance . . . Family, the book seems to be saying, never breaks down completely, no matter how neglected or strained. Paul's instinctive willingness to take on the world for his son, at all costs, is a moving evocation of the bonds of blood . . . the prose has all the qualities of modern literary classic. (Huffington Post UK)Ostensibly a crime thriller, in American screenwriter Noah Hawley's hands it plays out more as a meditation on fatherhood with a subplot that brilliantly subverts the romance of the American road trip . . . sure to be a massive hit on both sides of the Atlantic. (Huffington Post UK)With nimble prose and acute psychological insight, Hawley traces Allen's guilt-racked quest to prove his son's innocence. The result is a moving family saga that explores the intriguing notion of a statue of limitations on parental responsibility. (People)Noah Hawley taps into Lionel Shriver and Jared Lee Loughner for THE GOOD FATHER, which tracks a man's descent into the mind of his son, arrested for killing a presidential front-runner. (Publishers Weekly best books of Spring 2012)With great skill, Hawley renders Dr. Allen's treacherous emotional geography, from his shock and guilt to his growing sense that he knows far less about his son than he thought . . . (Publisher's Weekly)A heartfelt and beautifully written novel . . . Comparisons with We Need To Talk About Kevin will be inevitable as THE GOOD FATHER deals with a parent trying to comprehend how their child could have become a killer. Written from the point of view of a father questioning his parenting skills. Noah Hawley gives the age old question of nature versus nurture a fresh angle. This is a novel about family, love and the decisions we make. Well written, thrilling and compelling. I highly recommend it. (U Magazine (Ireland))A gripping and poignant novel that chimes with We Need to Talk About Kevin and Jon Krakauer's Into the Wild. The Good Father is a clever dissection of American gun culture, and what it means to love and trust someone. The perfect reading group book. (Patrick Neale in the Bookseller)A thriller, a drama, a search for sanity in an insane situation; you absolutely must read this book. (Weekend Post (Cairns, Australia))