

A friend once told me that he could never write fiction because it required thinking of what each person would say in conversation and he couldn't do that. It made me think of my teen years when I was socially inept and tried to protect myself by imagining conversations with my peers. I would strategize what to say in response to their possible remarks, so that I would seem like a good friend or at least, better than a moron.

Those mental exchanges were actually practice that prepared me to be a writer of fiction. Over the years, I have developed a knack for imagining what people who have never existed would say in response to other characters. And I do this without resorting to substituting real people into their personalities, as some authors do. Even in imagining what characters look like, I don't use the visage of people I have known. I will admit, however, that some of my storylines come from dreams I recall from twilight sleep. I used to keep a pencil and paper beside my bed to write down notes on my dreams because I discovered that they are quickly forgotten when I rise. But no more. I have determined that a dream I can't recall is not a good situation for my characters because, obviously, it isn't memorable.

You might make a counterpoint, saying that events in this story aren't impressive to you, even if some of them come from my memorable dreams. If that's the case, I will have to live with your assessment. But to me, my fictional situations serve as illustrations of modern day complexities. While the book focuses on insurance practices and policies, you should find underpinnings of common human emotions, like dealing with the loss of loved ones, or the opposite, seeking someone to love you. From a Christian perspective, these situations should show that a life with Christ is better than one without Him. The sermons that Stan delivers speak directly to this point and the characters of Claire and Orbie contrast the two primary responses to his messages. One will reject a relationship with Jesus, choosing instead to live a life of their own making. And the other will draw close to Christ when faced with life's major decisions.

At the end of the story, Claire's fate is undecided, whether she will become like her uncle Tommy or her mentor, Apoc, a person of compassion. But Orbie, the red-headed extrovert, makes his choice clear, to take a chance in order to find the love he never got from his parents.

There are other contrasts, like the one between Eve Marion and Lucy. Both girls are seeking a faithful mate but one is willing to reciprocate that trust because of her Christian faith and the other isn't sure she can do it. The tragedy there is that Eve doesn't realize how unattractive her libertine attitude is to a person of faith. And on a larger scale, there is Stan's company, a corporation without heart, and the Stuart dynasty, dedicated to the welfare of their town because it was established by their ancestors. One expresses a motive whose currency is money, and the other, whose profit is in people. There is no controversy about which one the Bible advocates. People are much more important to God than anything else in the world, although sometimes we don't feel that way with all the bad things that happen in life. The tornado is the chief illustration of this attitude and represents the theme of the book— Why do bad things happen to good people?

It's an age-old question that Stan attempts to answer in one of his frequent talks with Claire. And whether it gets through to her or not is unresolved. Like the issue in the minds of most people, she thinks bad things are God's fault, if He even exists, because He allows them to happen to good people. Ironically, the Bible answers this accusation in two ways, neither one is a way the townfolk want to hear, that nobody is truly good except God himself, meaning everyone deserves punishment, and that tragedy is allowed to show people their need for Him. Unfortunately, most people who have lived, and will live in the future, declare themselves good enough and strong enough to live their lives without God. It is an allowed deception because God created them with the ability to choose, even before they knew the choices.

The title, Storm Tally, reflects how people decide such things. They weigh the storms in life against the probability of survival and most conclude that they're okay, because the odds are in their favor. Yet recorded history plainly shows that death awaits us all, and there is no satisfactory preparation for it without trust in Christ to give us a good home in the spirit world that follows. Other ideas about a life after death offer no promise of reward other than a hope of God's favor, a better reincarnation, or no life at all, *i.e.*, annihilation. The first evokes legalism, the second has only hope for a better outcome, and the latter, no hope at all. So man has four options— trust in Christ, trust in your works, trust in reincarnation, or trust in annihilation. Of the four choices, which one is the best insurance for your future?



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