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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ YOUNG ADULT FICTION

## Eli the Good

**Silas House**
Candlewick Press (September 2009)
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*Eli the Good* is a grown man's recollection of what it was like to be the ten-year-old son of an emotionally distant mother and a father suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. Woven into this family are Eli's equally troubled aunt, sister, and best friend. His aunt, who became famous protesting the Vietnam War, has come home to live with her brother's family while she fights breast cancer. His sister is dealing with the new and painful knowledge that the dad she has always known is not her biological father. His best friend is Edie, the little girl next door whose parents have just divorced.

Throughout the book, Eli watches his family struggle. The lasting effects of the Vietnam War are felt by every member. Each of them must work to overcome their differences and to forgive their often bitter disagreements. Though almost al-ways an observer, Eli also struggles. While everyone around him is working through their own problems, he is left feeling unloved. He tries very hard to understand his family members, even when their pain is far more than a ten year-old boy can handle. The stress this creates causes him to lash out at Edie when she needs his friendship the most. Ultimately, Eli must learn to accept even those behaviors which he cannot comprehend, forgive himself and those around him for their human weaknesses, and accept and share in the love each family member offers him.

This is the fourth novel from award-winning writer Silas House and it is truly remarkable. House's writing is almost poetic in its beauty, and he is able to invoke a sense of time and place to which readers young and old can relate. His description of a beech tree demonstrates this: "I appreciated beeches in particular because their leaves don't fall in the autumn but cling to the branches until new, bright green ones come back in the spring. All through the winter, the brown, shriveled leaves of autumn hang there, staying with the tree until new ones come along to replace them. The beech wasn't an evergreen but was never alone, never without its leaves."

The characters in *Eli the Good* come alive, and one cannot help but feel emotionally connected to the people and events in this story. Though set specifically in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, its lessons of friendship, hope and love are timeless. Moreover, these lessons are keenly relevant to today's young adults who are struggling to learn these things in a world and in families that continue to be affected by war and its consequences.
(September / October 2009)

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