

My Leaning Post

Lizzie Belle Quimby

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"I could hear the television in the family room in the basement as the kids and I sat in the living room, holding each other and crying. Grant came bounding up the stairs and started yelling that he wasn't going to tolerate a bunch of crybabies. He grabbed anything within reach—a vase, lamp, picture frames—and threw them across the room where they hit the wall and shattered. He said he'd do the same to every one of us if we didn't shut up." This passage describes one of the milder episodes that Elizabeth Baldwin, the heroine of *My Leaning Post*, endures as the wife of a psychopathic abuser. Not long afterward, one of her sons threatens to kill himself when he tires of living with such a hateful, violent father and a mother helpless to prevent the daily horror.

Elizabeth, about whom Lizzie Belle Quimby writes with an obvious sense of personal understanding, was the child of cold parents. Her mother was content to sit in a corner of the living room and knit, rarely speaking, while her father communicated only with a "helper" named Margaret who verbally abused her mother and slept with her father. The child knew something was wrong; she even went to a lawyer and begged him to have Margaret thrown out of their house. Later, Elizabeth sought solace in religion and in her own children, three of them products of an early and unsuccessful marriage. Then she met Grant, a married man who courted her shamelessly. Once they were together, a long pattern of shocking cruelty began—sexual attacks, humiliation, and physical violence against Elizabeth and her children. With no money or resources, cut off from her family, she could only suffer and obey. Eventually, Elizabeth finds the courage to escape her abusive husband and seeks help through therapy.

This straightforward, simply constructed story gives the impression of a thinly veiled autobiographical tale, at times seeming stranger than fiction, as truth often does. From the beginning, the reader is caught up in the trials and misfortunes of an unloved child naively struggling to get by in a chaotic and unhealthy environment. Elizabeth's shame and guilt are burdens many abuse victims share, and her search for peace and self forgiveness will be familiar to them. *My Leaning Post* drifts slightly off point in the final chapters, limiting the reader's ability to identify with the central character. The earlier, focused account of abuse, escape, realization, and recovery is far more powerful and meaningful to the reader than the description of Elizabeth's later life (love affairs, two more marriages, her interactions with her children).

However, there are readers who will find this book helpful, perhaps seeing themselves in Elizabeth's story. That she doesn't lose her faith in God and goodness, despite her many hardships, may also inspire her audience.

BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (October 5, 2012)

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