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Barn Burning
by William Faulkner
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Faulkner's "Barn Burning" tells the story of a young boy, Colonel Sartoris, whose father is a ruthless person, full of hate towards the society of the time. Little Sarty has to witness his father's cruel actions—that is, burning the barns of the landowners who let him work their land in exchange for a small portion of the crop.

What is really amazing is that the little boy realizes how wrong his father's actions are, despite the way he was brought up. One can't help sympathizing with him while also admiring how precocious he is. It is very likely that his mother could have contributed to his good nature, although years of living with a cruel and abusive husband stop her from defending little Sarty from her husband's abusive behavior.

The little boy is torn between his love for his father and his instinctive sense of right and wrong. He senses that the present society had done his father wrong at one point in time, but he also hopes that his father will feel avenged after burning the last barn and return to a normal life: "Maybe he's done satisfied now..." (Faulkner, 192).

There's no doubt that Sarty is a good person. The judge knows it from his facial expression and refuses to question him, realizing how traumatizing the trial was for the little boy: "Do you want me to question this little boy?...No! Damnation! Send him out of here!" (191).

Also, his father realizes that if questioned, Sarty would have told the truth about his father's actions: "You were fixing to tell them. You would have told him" (193). The final proof is his own admission when his father demands to know the truth.

When his father tells him that he has to "learn to stick to [his] own blood" because the people were only trying to get back at him, Sarty has a totally different point of view: "If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again" (193). These thoughts—from twenty years later in his life—allow the readers to anticipate that Faulkner will allow Sarty to grow and change into a mature and responsible man, which make him a round character.

His father's new job for Major de Spain allows Sarty to envision how his life could be. The simple view of the beautiful house brings him a "surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought into words" (194). Once again, Sarty hopes that his father will be touched by the view of the beautiful house and stop his rage: "Maybe he will feel it too. Maybe it will even change him now from what maybe couldn't help but be" (194). Of course, his father's unacceptable behavior will once again land him in trouble—although this time, young Sarty decides to do something about it. By warning Major de Spain, he takes his fate in his own hands. When he hears the gun shots, he runs to his father's aid, although he knows it was already too late. After he realizes that his father is dead, Sarty pays him a final homage, "My Father...He was brave! He was Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!" (201). Here, Faulkner decides to intervene to let the reader know that "his father had gone to that war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag..." (201).

After Sarty finds the strength to walk away without looking back, the readers feel closure, knowing that Sarty will be better off on his own, rather than with his dysfunctional family. Faulkner's story is a wonderful example of how even a sparkle of humanity can be enough to guide lost or misguided souls in their journey through life.

Works Cited

Faulkner, William . "Barn Burning." *Literature: An Introduction to Writing*. Roberts, Edgar V. and Jacobs, Henry E. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001. 190-201.