

## -SYLVIA-

Nope. I couldn't even picture myself getting married in a church. We rise and sing "Rock of ages." I mumble my way through it. We sit.

The church is about half full, and most of them are elderly people, catching the late service. Everyone here is dressed rather well, too, but without much color, and in very old fashion.

No, I've never been inside a church until this morning. It's scary. There's Jesus, all crucified, and dead, and bleeding, nailed to a cross, with a big flow of blood spilling out of the gash in his left side. It's not painted, just the sight of the polished wood makes me pull back. I try not to look at it. There are stained glass windows that drown the light into bleak colors against Latin words etched in black along its bottom rows. The pews are uncomfortable, rigid, like they're posture correcting. Overhead the drone of the organ reverberates back down on me from the ceiling, and fills the whole wooden structure with booming echoes.

Loopy folds out the cushioned banister at our feet. Then we kneel.

We acknowledge that we have sinned in thoughts in words and in deeds, by our will and action and by our disinterest and inaction. That which we have done and left undone.

We plead for forgiveness.

We sit again.

Now I don't have any quarrels with God, but this religion thing is not for me.

We look at our insert. The preacher reads the regular print and we read the bold all-caps print.

*May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you now and forever-*

**-and also with you.**

*Let us lift up our voices to the lord.*

**We lift them up.**

*Let us rejoice and praise the lord.*

**It is right to give thanks and praise.**

I've been trying to put it all together. It still doesn't make sense.

We stand and sing "Onward Christian soldier" I substitute the lyrics from the clash's "London Calling" to fake it through. It's so old school.

A reading from the book of Timothy.

*"He appeared in a body was vindicated by the  
spirit was seen by the angels was  
believed on by the world was taken up in glory."*

He goes on and on, while I try to figure out what's going on with Loopy. He has to have someone helping in his little schemes.

*The word of the Lord*

**Thanks be to God.**

The collection plate comes around. I throw in 75 cents. When the sermon begins I tap Loopy's shoe with my foot.

"Hey, Loopy tell me about some of the people you know."

"Shhhh."

"C'mon I'm bored."

"Listen to the sermon."

I look back up at the pulpit with all the gold cups and candelabras littered all over the place, then to the priest in his big white sparkley Poncho. Then inevitably back up at the dead, wood Jesus.

"Paul-who was once called Saul-never met Jesus, at least not before his appearance on the road to Damascus. In that event, he appeared not as Jesus, the humble carpenter known to the apostles, but as Christ, Lord and Messiah, Salvation of the Jews and Gentiles. Almighty and glorified-

I roll my eyes with a deep sigh. "You must have some friends, right?"

"Sylvia," He whispers "Shut the fuck up."

An elderly lady ahead of us almost turns around.

"Now look at what you made me do."

"Don't blame me, Loopy."

“Lupe.” he voices rather loudly.

“Loopy,” I smile “Tell me about the people you hang out with.” At this he just sits stationary. Stoic.

“Saul had accepted Christ as a man, only a man. He accepted Jesus as a rebel, troublemaker, and as a heretic. This is just as all the Pharisees had done.”

I straighten the fabric of my argyle skirt and fix my blouse, wondering if this might be the bad moment to pump him for information.

“You know, you go out to the bar, late some night and meet a few of your fellas there? Everyone’s glad to see you. You get a warm greeting.”

His stoic eyes now look at me

Now his eyes look back at me with intention, but there's something out of place. He looks weaker, faded.

“Amigos? Comrades? Buddies? In my English class there's a girl named Lori, and she's the only person that I really connect to.”

“Sylvia, you're in church. God is trying to speak to you, doesn't that mean anything?”

“Well, what's God said to you recently? Told you that you're doing a great job? Go forth and steal shit? Pawn for the kingdom of heaven? Blessed are you in the gutted warehouse in the crack pipe side of town?”

He grabs me by the arm, and it hurts. I dig my nails into his hand.

“In a glorious moment, Saul receives full revelation, which inspire these words. The man he has hunted and wounded is fully man, fully God. Saul has become Paul. Paul, the disciple convinced, convicted. He sees the divinity and he sees the humility. Has this happened to you? Have you come here seeking just a man? Have you come here seeking just a God? Like Paul, lo, your search is one in the same, dear friends.”

He drags me by my arm, and my hand scratches across his wrist. He drags me to the end of the pew.

“Ouch! Hey! Stop it you dick.”

The sermon stops here while I fight to unbind myself from Loopy's grasp.

“Son of a bitch. Let go of me.”

I'm dragged up the aisle, where Loopy opens the door and tosses me out to the sidewalk. The sun is total and glaring against the faded gray, black and white of the church. Even the duller colors outside are more alive than dim tones through stained glass.

"You don't want to believe in God? That's fine. Just leave me alone, Sylvia."

"You haven't got any friends at all, have you? There's nobody you can trust with your secrets, so you're all alone."

Standing at the church, he doesn't look to have a leg to stand on. He must know someone. He has to have at least one name. Spill it. Spill it.

"Come on, Loopy, name me one friend, and I'll leave you alone." He sneers.

"Jesus Christ, and he's no friend of yours."

He closes the big wooden church door faster than it was meant to be shut.

"I never said I didn't want to believe in God, asshole."

I turn from the church and wander to the nearest bus stop.

"Lupe is a girl's name, you retard." Damn. I wanted to say that to his face.

He doesn't have any friends. He's all alone with nobody to trust. That doesn't make any sense. He must have a connection to him. He must know Ken somehow.

I ride the next bus, heading back to Loopy's. My hand is on the torsion wrench in my bag, and I wonder how much time I have before he'll get back. I know what I'm going back through, too. Tho, I've found out since that where he lives is mostly deserted. It's still not anyplace I want to waste a Sunday afternoon on. All the same, for him, I'd do it.

## -DAVE-

I turn back into the church. The silence from Father Lendez has gone on quite longer than it should have. When I clear the threshold, the entire congregation stares at me. I'm looking back at him directly, humbled.

“David, was that really necessary?”

I bite my tongue, and return to my seat.

## -ARTHUR-

Oh, my God.

I'm trembling again. It's my hands. My arms up to my elbows, I can't stop them.

My head. My Stomach.

Every fucking inch of me.

A jigsaw puzzle made of glass, slowly pushed off the edge of the table. The pieces fall one by one and break on the hard floor below. The whole puzzle is pushed, and comes apart piece by piece until the last one shatters into a pile of jagged, broken glass. That's how I feel right now.

I can feel my empty stomach trembling. I force my arms and hands to function enough to grab the rim of the toilet. The sweat on my body is colder than the icy ceramic toilet bowl. I force my chin up over the rim once more, and weakly cough, and gag. A gob of burning spit and mucous, sour with puke and stomach acid drops from my yellow tongue and plops into the muddied basin. I've been hurling for hours. There are no more drugs. There's no more medicine.

I am mired in a bog of human waste. My hangover feels like a slap on the wrist compared to the misery of coming down from way too much coke and heroin.

The last of the spit leaves me in a spray out of my mouth, and I deeply gag once more. Guttural, gasping sounds resound at me from every direction of the toilet bowl.

I'm the loneliest, most painful and pathetic thing on the face of the earth. How can I even breathe?

When I hit the ground, it feels loud and it is painful. I look back up at the toilet bowl from down here. Not even two feet off the ground, it seems a mile up. I made it, and now I'm back on the floor again. The trembling takes over.

That's when my cell-phone goes off, ringing stabbing sharp pain from straight through my ears into each cavity of my skull.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to  
[Author@14rivers.com](mailto:Author@14rivers.com)

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