

## Early Morning Prayer

"Why do I keep doing this," the dark haired girl sitting on my bed asked in a sigh of exasperation.

"Doing what" I asked but I knew what she was talking about.

"You know what I'm talking about" she said as she searched the tangled covers for her shirt. "I just wish you would stop me," she said.

I sighed; I knew I couldn't argue with her.

"Don't you have anything to say for yourself," she asked.

I had plenty to say but I knew she didn't really want to hear it so I just lay there looking at the ceiling. She wiggled her way into her jeans and I watched a pillow vibrate off the bed and tumble to the ground. I looked over at her and saw her dark, loosely coiled hair and perpetually olive face silhouetted against the moonlight drifting in through the window. She was brushing her hair.

"My roommates will know what we did."

The brush that just a moment ago was in her hand was now flying at my face. I ducked just in time and heard a thud as the brush hit the wall behind me. "So what" I said ignoring the brush attack. "God - isn't it possible even *your* roommates have slept with a guy before?"

"Don't talk about my roommates - you don't even know them." She said searching the sheets for what I assumed as another object to throw at me. Suddenly she stopped rummaging through the linen and look up at me with her dark eyes; "We need to pray."

"Oh God, not this again" the words escaped my mouth like a breath.

"Yes, this again, and don't use the Lord's name in vain."

"You're insane."

"I'm not insane, and you're blasphemous." She was dressed and made her way to my bedroom door. "Are you coming?" she asked though I knew I didn't have a choice.

I slid out of bed and made my way to my dresser. I found a pair of sweats, tossed on a t-shirt and slid a pair of sandals on. I dug my toes into the Astroturf that was the sandal's soles. There was a hole where my big toe digs in the green plastic of the right footed sandal.

I walked to my dorm room door and looked out the peephole. "It's clear, let's go." In the tope colored hallway we walked past paper license plates with peoples names' on them taped to doors. "Which room is your R.A' .s?"

"That one" I said, pointing to a door with a license plate that said Matt.

Matt's like one of those teachers who wants to be cool and befriend the students but the students aren't fooled. That's what Matt reminds me of. He's the kind of guy who would have a beer with you, but you knew he would dick you over if you ever got on his bad side.

"We should ask him for advice about temptation." She said stopping just short of Matt's door.

"God, you can't be serious?" She hit me in the arm.

"Don't use the Lord's name in vain." She said a little too loudly.

"Shut up, do you want to get in trouble?" She got quiet and looked down.

"I'm sorry," I said. She looked away from me.

I ran my finger across her eyebrows going against the grain. She hated when I did that. She ran her fingers furiously across her eyebrows until she was satisfied they were fixed.

"You know I hate that - why do you do it?"

I couldn't tell her the real reason - that sometimes I just hated her so much; that I found simple pleasure in pissing her off so I said "I don't know. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, I forgive you" she said smiling at me. She always says things like I forgive you, God I hate it.

She smiled at me with the shy smile I couldn't resist. "I'm so pathetic" I said aloud.

"What" she asked.

"Nothing." I looked over at her. She really is stunning. Her mother is Brazilian- that's why she has the dark hair and olive skin. I brushed the back of my hand across her cheek. It was so soft. She took my hand and put it to her lips. I loved it when she did that.

"Let's go back to your room," she said flashing the smile I knew too well. We stopped walking and I looked at her.

"No, we're going to pray remember." I began walking again.

"We don't have to pray I was being stupid."

I knew she was being stupid but my mind was set. "We are going to the chapel and we are going to pray." My pride set in and I wasn't going to budge. She grabbed me and pulled me close to her. I smelled her sweet breath and faltered. I kissed her.

"Let's go back," she pleaded. I had played this game of wills with her before. My lungs swelled with a deep breath I slowly let out the air, shook off her Medusa stare, and began walking again. We soon reached the chapel.

"I hate this Catholic school." "Don't say that," she said as we entered through the thick oak doors. She dipped her fingers in the holy water and gen-flected next to a pew. I sat myself in a pew a few rows behind where she sat. There was no one else in the chapel. I knew there wouldn't be at 2:00 in the morning. "You should sit by me," she said.

"No I'm comfortable where I am," a lie. I'm never comfortable in this place.

"I really wish you would sit by me." She pouted.

I sighed and gave in. It wasn't worth fighting over. She folded down the knee bench and knelt, eyes closed and head bowed. I sat looking at the crucifix in a daydream. There was Jesus hanging from a tree with spikes in his hands. All of that for me I thought. "Crazy." She was praying aloud in a perceptible whisper.

"Please forgive him he doesn't know what he does." She heard what I said and knew what I was thinking. She always knew what I was thinking and always thought she was better than me because she begged forgiveness. I could never ask forgiveness. "Forgive his pride," she said.

She stopped and looked me. "Kneel beside me before God."

"Leave me alone" I told her.

She looked down away from me, her shoulders slouched, and she began praying again. This time I couldn't hear her. I dropped to my knees onto the padded bench. A creak echoed throughout the hollow chapel. I caught her taking a glance at me. She smiled. I closed my eyes and tried to pray. I shivered and wondered how much colder it would have to be before I could see an ethereal cloud escaping my lips.

The only sound was her saintly breath and my pounding thoughts drowning out the words I wanted to say. All I could think of was the feel of her cheek the, the curve of her breasts.

"Oh God" I said aloud. Why couldn't I just pray?

She took my hand and said, "Let's pray aloud you can go first"

"No, I really don't want to do this."

"Please, for me." She kissed my hand again.

"I really don't want to, it's private. Truth is I couldn't dare tell what I was thinking.

"Okay, well I will, even if you won't" she said. "Dear God I pray tonight for Mom back in Brazil. Please don't let her be lonely. I also pray that you save dad wherever he is.

She didn't talk much about her father. All I really knew was that he used to be in the US army, went to Brazil impregnated her mother and left.

I guess I knew as much about him as she did. It's sad really.

"I also want to pray for my math test this Friday."

At this, I must have made a noise because she stopped praying and looked at me.

"What?" Her eyes glowed like the devil.

"Nothing - go on" I said.

"and I pray especially for him" she nodded my way as if ashamed to say my name in the house of God. "Lord let him understand the error in his ways and beg forgiveness for his sins." I couldn't take anymore and I stood up.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"For a walk" I said. I started walking toward the door each step echoing and overlapping the last.

I walked to the marble holy water basin, looked in and saw my reflection. My eyes looked tired and my hair looked grey. I saw wrinkles that I had never seen before. "I'm nineteen, how can I look so old?" I saw disgust and anger in my eyes. I searched for something familiar but the water reflected only a self I had never seen before. I looked vicious and cold. Is this how she sees me? Is this how everyone sees me? The water reflected something I didn't want to be.

I was caught in this reflection for what seemed like hours. Suddenly I heard movement and saw she was walking toward me. "What are you looking at?"

I'm not sure why but I told her about the reflection.

“Do you see what this means” she asked betraying her excitement. “It’s God showing you how you look in his eyes because of your sin.”

I couldn’t listen to her anymore. Surprising even myself, I spit in the basin. She screamed, “What the hell are you doing?”

I laughed, “You just said hell.”

“Don’t change the subject, why did you spit in the holy water what is wrong with you?”

I began walking away and she grabbed my shirt. “Why” she demanded. I couldn’t explain it to her. I couldn’t explain that I was tired of feeling dirty and ashamed for everything I did. I couldn’t tell her that the God I want to love wouldn’t be so caught up in trivial things like sex. Or that he wasn’t so vain as to demand the solemn observance of his name. So, I told her “I’m sorry-I didn’t mean too.”

“Oh, okay” she said apparently appeased by my practiced apology.

We walked back toward my room I led the way. She put her arm around me and moved in close. I moved a piece of hair out of her eyes and she began kissing me. We quietly made our way through the hallway of license plates and reached my door. She pinned me against the wall and whispered in my ear.

“I want you.” We entered the room and in a fury of clothes and heavy breathing made our way to my bed. She sighed “Oh God, oh God”, because I guess it’s okay to use God’s name in celebration.

The room once again grew silent after a symphony of moans and sighs. I made my way to the shower - dirty. But before I closed the bathroom

door I saw her buttoning her shirt. I saw her eyes close and her lips began moving in prayer.

by David Kobb