

# PLUM

an arts journal

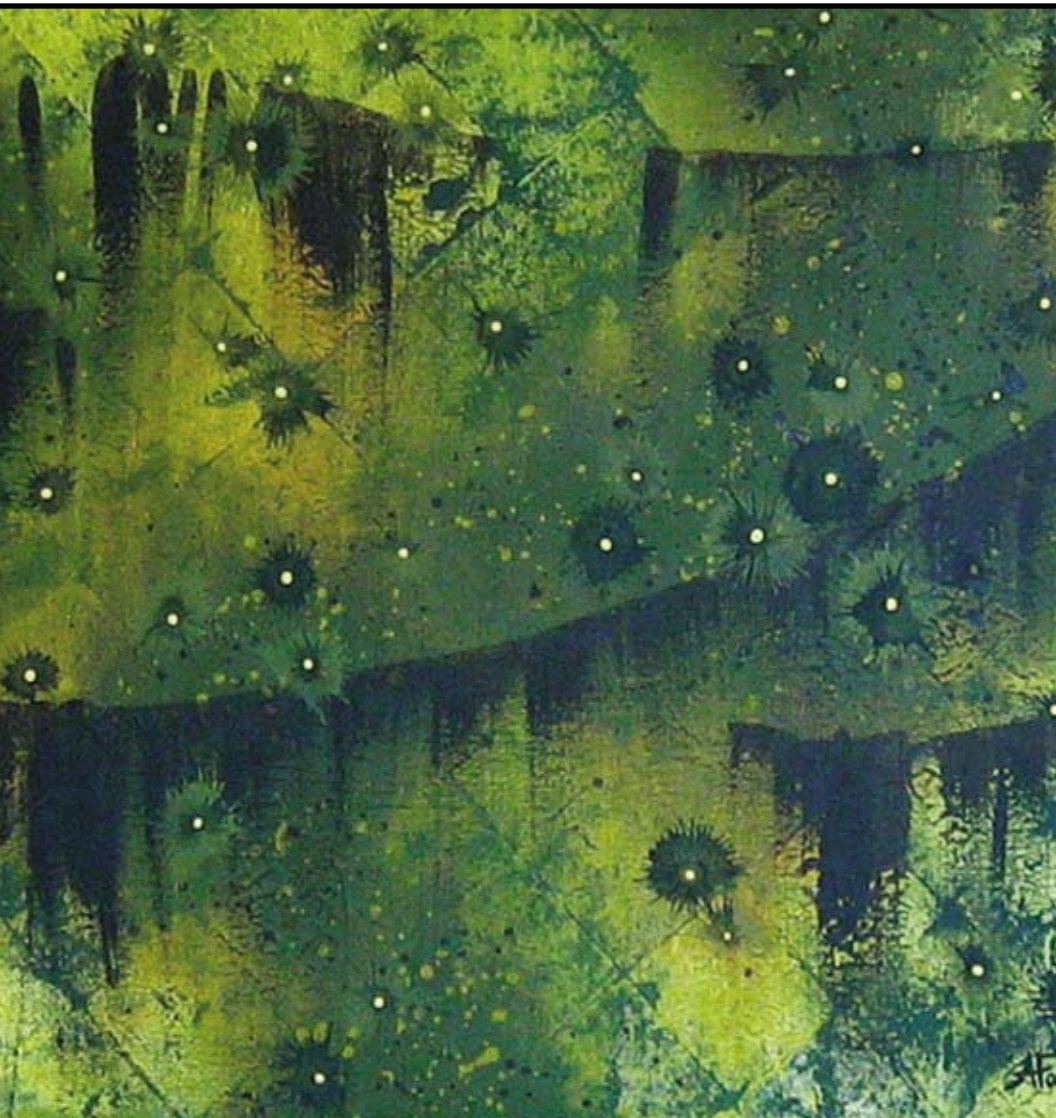


REST

FALL 2008

Cover image: **Snow Day, photograph, by Martina Scholtens, freshMD.com**

Below: **Tranquility in Green, acrylic on canvas, by Andrea Forstbauer, forstbauer.com/andrea**



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# Editor's Note



PLUMb is a semi-annual, not-for-profit arts journal providing encouragement and exposure to emerging Christian artists and writers. We are funded entirely through private sponsorship and group orders. To enquire, email us at [plumbplumb@gmail.com](mailto:plumbplumb@gmail.com).

Submission guidelines can be found at [plumb.ca](http://plumb.ca). We accept submissions of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction, critical essays, photographs, or visual art. For interviews, or book, movie, or music reviews please query first. Help with query writing is available on our website: [plumb.ca](http://plumb.ca).

PLUMb is now into its third year of publication. Special thanks to all of our talented contributors who continue to challenge and inspire us through this journal.



Rest has become increasingly elusive in our modern culture, a piece, for some, of nostalgia, a throwback to some older time. "In those days people just didn't have anything to do." The youth

today imagine it to have been a time of universal boredom.

It's true that rest ought to be a ceasing of our labours, but is it also a ceasing of our pleasures? Perhaps. I find that I have both labour and pleasure aplenty, but not rest. A friend suggested to me that rest was not a lack of activity but a condition of the heart, along the lines of *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence, who, in his state of peace and rest in the Presence of God, was able to accomplish twice as many tasks as his fellow monks. But I'm not sure God doesn't mean exactly what we think He means: take a day, don't work, don't run around, don't busy yourself, not even in the interest of "fun".

I certainly don't live like that, but thinking this way definitely changes what I believe about time. When you use time for neither work nor fun, time ceases to be a resource, a thing to be used. It ceases to be anything at all, in fact. And it is then we are reminded that we are not in ultimate control, but are subject to a Will that exists beyond all time.

The irony, as I write this note for our Rest issue, is that I have been up since five in an attempt to get everything ready for printing.

Photos and artwork by Andrea Forstbauer and Krista Little, poetry by Kelvin Bueckert, Ian Williams, and T. Marie Nantais, and fiction by Tony France each give us a reason to reflect on just what it means to rest.

(I think this is where I'll stop. It's time to head off for work.)

Blessings,

# Comeback

by Ian Williams

*Surely I come quickly.*

—last recorded words

*See? I'm talking like I know.*

*It's dangerous talking for Jesus.*

*You get carried away almost immediately.*

—Naomi Shihab Nye

International terminal, arrivals section.

That's him. Tanned, sunglasses on his head

a small tote bag like a leashed cocker spaniel  
at his heels.

You shout Jesus and hold up your sign.  
His eyes focus, his arms open to greet you.

Then you see it.

☞

You?

I mean I.

☞

Wrong floor. Maybe departures is where all this happens. No one's rejoicing to see him go

with his pilot uniform and cap  
shepherding five virgin stewardesses  
through the gate.

The other five are at the wrong counter thinking they want to go to the Bahamas. Paradise Island.

☞

They?

Among us.

☞

Plane takes off.  
Airport is lost  
under the clouds

of smoke.

☞

It doesn't have to end like that.  
He's not in the airport at all  
or circling the sky for that matter.

He's driving loops around the terminal  
refusing to spend the money to park.

He's expecting to see you  
and your black baggage  
outside. The flight's delayed

as usual and the security's coming  
to scream a flashlight up in his face.

☞

*Sublime upon sublime scarcely presents a contrast, and we need a little rest from everything, even the beautiful.! • Victor Hugo*

Two verses scroll across the LED board:  
ATLANTA\*BOSTON\*16heavenarchan  
gel\*PARIS  
ONTIME\*ONTIME\*DELAYED\*ON  
TIME\*DEL

☞☛

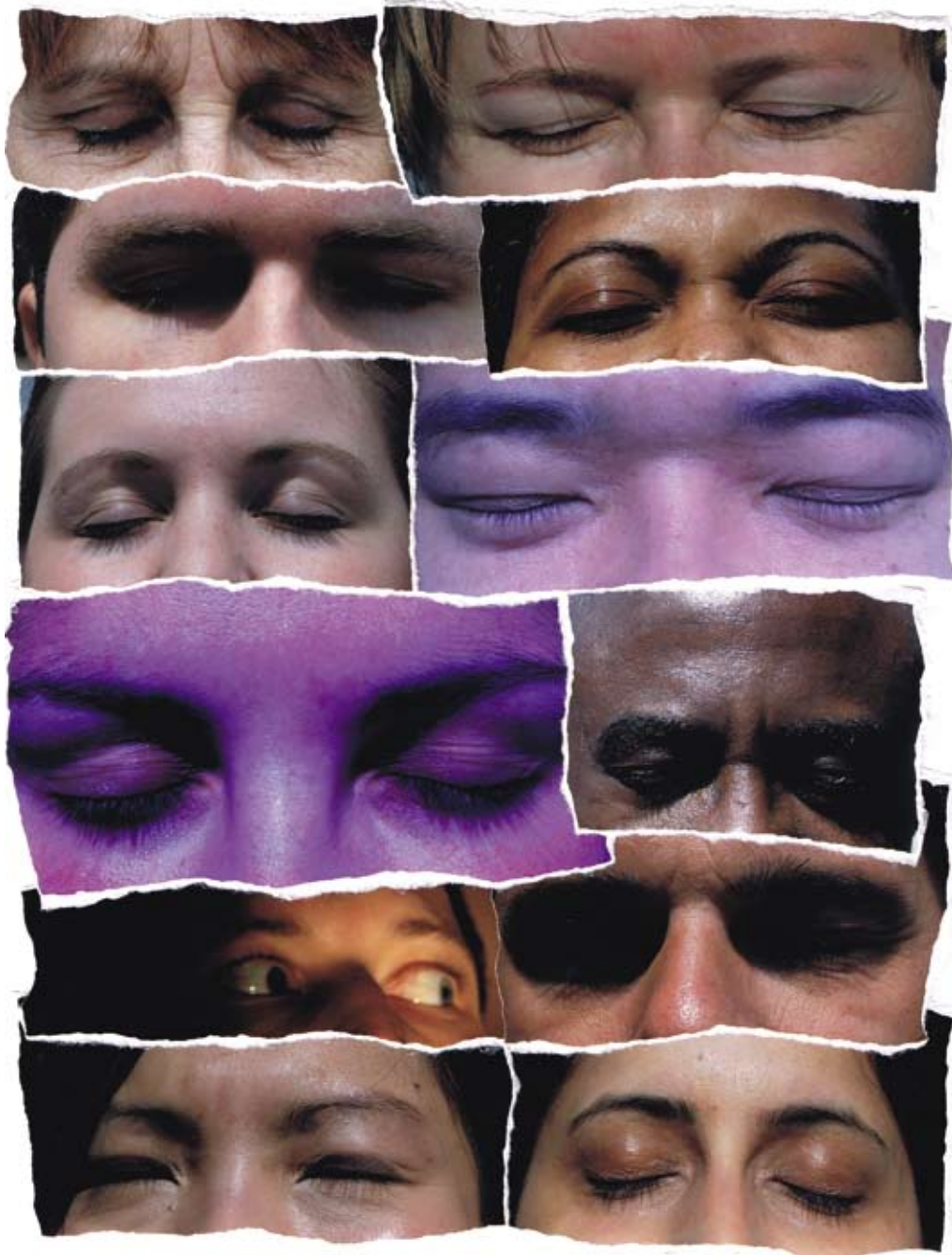
You?

No, you. †

trump\*SEOUL\*17caughtup\*TORONT  
O\*cloudsever  
AYED\*ARRIVED\*ONTIME\*ARRIVE  
D\*ONTIME  
But you know that version.



**Smouldering Subsidence, acrylic on canvas, by Andrea Forstbauer, [forstbauer.com/andrea](http://forstbauer.com/andrea)**



**Finding Rest, photo collage, by Mark David Smith, [pithosmith.com](http://pithosmith.com)**

*When you are old and gray and full of sleep, and nodding by the fire, take down this book and slowly read, and dream of the soft look your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep.* • William Butler Yeats

# Sleepless

by Kelvin Bueckert, kelvinbueckert.com

Money  
or the lack of it  
is creative  
in throwing its airless blanket  
over any comfort  
found  
in the claustrophobia  
of possessions  
rolling in the grit  
of our beloved insomnia  
beside the mattress  
and the knowledge  
of rest  
as a spiritual gift †

# Park

by T. Marie Nantais

The bench hard,  
painted green, marked  
with carved letters  
names of people seated  
here days, months, years  
before  
You get up, wander over  
to where sand is piled,  
raked in a small area  
marked off by weathered boards  
You plop down  
smile, wave  
calling to me †

*The lion and the calf shall lie down together but the calf won't get much sleep.* • Woody Allen

# Cottage in the Woods

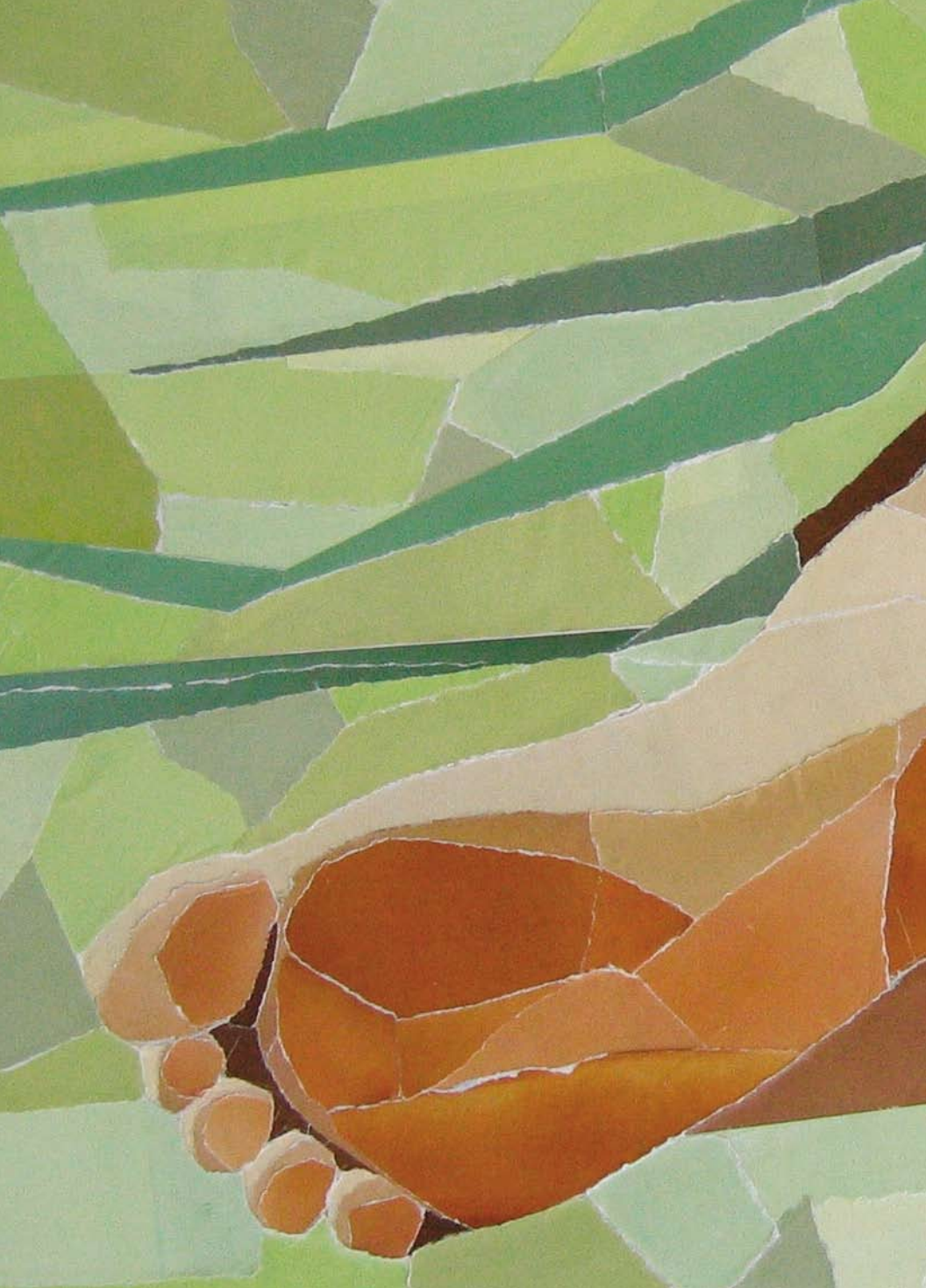
by T. Marie Nantais

A gray cat, black stripe  
curling around its tail tip  
sleeps sprawled on its side  
in the corner of a time worn porch  
A swing with white paint peeling  
sways from rusted hooks fastened  
into its ceiling  
Softly falling rain  
bends purple foxgloves,  
their flower tips  
kissing tops of black-eyed Susans  
and a lady bug lands on  
the gold plated rim of a china cup  
detailed with ruby roses †

*The dignity of the artist lies in his duty of keeping awake the sense of wonder in the world. In this long vigil he often has to vary his methods of stimulation; but in this long vigil he is also himself striving against a continual tendency to sleep.* • Marc Chagall



**A Homeless Man  
Sleeps Here,  
Photograph, by  
Mark David Smith,  
pithosmith.com**



*A man who is eating or lying with his wife or preparing to go to sleep in humility, thankfulness and temperance, is, by Christian standards, in an infinitely higher state than one who is listening to Bach or reading Plato in a state of pride. • C.S.Lewis*



**My Resting Place,**  
coloured paper collage,  
by **Andrea Forstbauer,**  
[www.forstbauer.com/andrea](http://www.forstbauer.com/andrea)

*I want to know all Gods thoughts; all the rest are just details.* • Albert Einstein



Daughter, pen and ink on paper, by Krista Little

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LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT OF THE WAY





**Yes, It was That Beautiful, photograph, by Krista Little**

# Navigator

by Kelvin Bueckert, [kelvinbueckert.com](http://kelvinbueckert.com)

Radar  
sounds  
rest through  
the nature  
of bat like twitters  
vibrating words  
as the master signals  
wave weary craft  
toward harbor  
over ocean shivers †

*He who cannot rest, cannot work; he who cannot let go, cannot hold on; he who cannot find footing, cannot go forward.* • Harry Emerson Fosdick

# The Church of "O"?

Let it Rest: Why Christians should be neither surprised nor dismayed by Oprah's Pop Spirituality

by Mark David Smith, [pithosmith.com](http://pithosmith.com)

The emails, at least, seem to have subsided for now. For a while they were coming daily, circulating through the ranks of the Christian faithful to finally make their way to my inbox with the letters "FWD" in the subject line. Inside was a message of shock and dire warning, and a link to a Youtube® video with clips of Oprah and her latest spiritual guru, Eckhart Tolle. The word was getting out: Oprah wasn't one of us. Beware!

Of course, none of the well-meaning faithful emailing me felt the need to bring up the irony of the slick production quality of this video, nor the dark, deep voice of the narrator, who used the same professionalism we would expect whenever we see a blockbuster thriller advertised by a major Hollywood studio. Fight media with media, is that it? Good luck.

Oprah Winfrey is widely acknowledged as the most influential and powerful woman in American media. Her nationally syndicated show, her magazine, her Book Club, her film production company—*The Great Debaters*, starring Denzel Washington and Forest Whitaker, is her most recent HARPO film—all of these have served to put Oprah at the top of just about every type of media America offers. When she promotes a book, it becomes a bestseller, and when she endorsed Barak Obama for president, many said that her word on it might actually be responsible for putting him in the White House. If that's true, it points

to a legitimate flaw in the American form of democracy. Time will tell.

But this worldly power was never a problem for Christians, it seems to me, as long as they believed Oprah was "one of us". The famous adage by Lord Acton that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" does not really apply to Oprah. Power hasn't corrupted Oprah. What we might say instead is that the power that the world offers is only available to a certain set of beliefs and principles, especially malleable ones. Now that it is clear she is not a "real" Christian, that power is suddenly a threat?

Oprah grew up in the Baptist Church, and for a time attended Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, and we can see many Christian principles that come out in her personality and the types of subjects covered in her show. But they are the kind of Christian principles that, in another context, might be Buddhist, or Muslim, or Hindu principles — you name it. They are the kinds of moral principles upon which most of the world agrees: fairness, compassion, care, honesty. Come on, it's a big step up from Jerry Springer, you have to admit.

What would make it Christian? Only the gospel of Grace. But that gospel can't last on National Television. That gospel requires an acknowledgement of the personal and universal problem of sin, and of the personal and universal need for a Saviour, and that there is one name



**Oprah Death Mask,  
Golden Resin, by  
Daniel Edwards.  
Photo courtesy of  
NYC's Les Kesting  
Gallery**

given to that saviour: Jesus Christ.

That is the Christian Gospel.

If it were popular enough to be a guiding principle on network television, that would mean that the bulk of the population was thought to be in support of it. But the advertising dollars are gauged strictly; the message has to appeal to the target audience. Unfortunately, this audience is not predominantly Christian. We should not be surprised. This is the world we live in. For Christians, it has always been the world we have lived in. “All men will hate you because of me,” Jesus says (Matt. 10:22). The gospel has never been “popular” in that sense.

We also don't need to be surprised or upset when we hear that two million people are “turning to Oprah” for spiritual guidance by participating in her “webinars” with Tolle. I doubt very much that these are the faithful being deceived

out of their own churches. More likely, these are the same people who bought *The Celestine Prophecy* and other new age books, and who will always turn to a person who reinforces the message of the World, the message to which they already adhere: you are good enough to get into heaven on your own.

As one mentor of mine once told me, “Stick with me long enough and I'll disappoint you. Keep your eyes on the prize.” By the prize, he meant Christ. Any time we put our hopes in people, whether it be a family member or a media mogul, we are bound to have our hopes dashed.

This is the world. “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”. We ought not be taken in, nor surprised when the gospel of Christ doesn't come back to us through the television. †

# The Painted Skin

A Short Story

by Tony France



Tattoo, photograph digitally oiled in The GIMP, by Mark David Smith, pithosmith.com

He had etched upon her a palimpsest of broken vows stretching from wrist to shoulder, markings lacerated past recognition. A dragon tattoo. The budding rose of youthful romance, grieved but never forgotten, lay somewhere beneath the skin, covered up by the Leviathan — like Danny himself — of serpentine scheming, elusive but ever present.

The infection seemed to have stopped spreading.

Deceived by the miracle gift, she had watched the growing syphilitic ulcer stop at the red marked contour of the serpent, believing she was cured, and believing by extension that Danny cared and only wanted what was good for her. The ulcer, arrested by the mercuric sulphide present in the red pigment within the skin, had simply gone deeper down into the dermis, deep down under Danny's branded mark of ownership, deep like a cheap carnival artist's needle.

She tried to bleed it out. A carnival jagger applied silver nitrate to the open gash on her arm but that left a dead

white scar bearing the ghostly contour of the beast, beneath which in her heart lay the budding rose, now faded from her arm but whose fragrance filled dream sodden nights.

She had heard from one of the girls that the marks on her skin could be erased by laser light. Was that safe? Red lights had lured her to the streets where men like Danny lurked.

Then one day, down the dead end darkness, she saw sunlight explode through a stained glass window, the Virgin Maiden and Child at the center of a starburst of color set in intricate geometrical patterns. She followed the light, reached a granite stairway, and stood before a door. She strained to pry the door open, entered the silence into a rosy penumbra and sat down to rest.

She usually finished work at dawn, and would then sleep into the late afternoon when the sun angled low against the window. It became a habit, a necessity, to come gather up whatever reserve of light came through the stained glass Maiden and Child. With spring approaching, at her chosen hour, the

beam would come falling across a slightly shifting section of pews. She always sat under the focused beam, bathed in its vivifying radiance. Spring seemed a futile hope, with the eternally recurring Danny like a shadow falling over all vernal bloom. With the dying hours of the day lengthening into evening, she began to report late for work.

Danny followed her to see where she was hiding.

The shifting daylight now cast the glimmering halo shining through the Virgin Maiden and Child between the two rows of pews, onto the granite floor. She so needed the warm light. She felt too weary to go on without it. She lay in perfect repose under the balm of sunlight pouring forth through the window. The breath came out of her as her aching muscles came to rest upon the unyielding stone. Her arms fell to her side; all strength was drained from her legs. She closed her eyes. The door was thrust open. Danny came charging in.

He saw her lying lifeless under effulgent light. He peered into the dimness at her lying perfectly still. Panic stricken, he stepped back and stumbled. Her skin appeared pure white, and to him, dead. He gasped for air, looked around to see if anyone had seen him. The place was empty but for a dazzling beam of light coming in through the far window.

Danny turned and ran, not seeing her as she opened her eyes, soon to forget the very name of the woman who now slowly rose up to the warm embrace of sunlight. †

# Two in a Pew

by Mark David Smith, [pithosmith.com](http://pithosmith.com)

**TOM** (to John, who has just entered): Hey, there you are. I called you this morning. Wanted to see if you wanted to go for breakfast before church.

**JOHN:** (sitting down) Oh, hey thanks. That would've been nice, but I've been here since 7:30 this morning.

**TOM:** 7:30? What for?

**JOHN:** I'm helping out with the Sunday School. Photocopying, putting out chairs, making snacks, you know.

**TOM:** Well, well. The fledgling believer is taking on a ministry. Good for you. I didn't even know you liked kids.

**JOHN:** Yeah...about that —

**TOM:** So, since we missed breakfast, why don't we go for brunch after the service?

**JOHN:** Oh, yeah, can't. Sorry. I'm working one of the tables for the missions fair this afternoon.

**TOM:** Maybe next —

**JOHN:** Next week I'm helping in the parking lot.

**TOM:** Sounds like you've gotten really involved.

**JOHN:** Yep. Can't forget youth group on Tuesday. Then there's middle-school youth Wednesday, choir practice Thursday, and the men's ministry Saturday. It's all very refreshing. Very —

**TOM:** Wait, choir? I've heard you sing.

**JOHN:** I didn't say I was doing solos. They said they needed more guys...

**TOM:** That sounds crazy. What about Sabbath? You know, Shabbat? A day of rest? No offence, but you look bagged,

not refreshed. Come on, you're working with youth, cars, and choir, but you don't like kids, you don't drive, and you can't sing.

**JOHN:** Hey, that's not true. I do drive. Just not my own car.

**TOM:** It's just — look, you ever hear of the 80/20 rule? Eighty percent of the work of the church is done by twenty percent of the people? Well at the rate you're going, that twenty percent will be out of work!

**JOHN:** And what's the alternative? What are you doing?

**TOM:** Hey. I take my Sabbath seriously.

**JOHN:** What, all week?

**TOM:** On Sundays I read.

**JOHN:** But you read every day. How is that a rest?

**TOM:** Look, Jesus said to come unto Him and he'd give you rest. That's rest, not stressed. Why can't you just do one thing you're passionate about and leave the rest to someone else? I mean, what if everyone did that instead?

**JOHN:** I think everyone did. And I'm the someone else.

**TOM:** Okay, I'll make you a deal. I'll take on a ministry that I feel passionate about, if you'll drop down to one that you feel passionate about. Then we can enjoy what we're doing, and still have time for fellowship.

**JOHN:** You mean brunch.

**TOM:** Hmm. Do you suppose brunch could be a ministry?

*TOM: It's just — look, you ever hear of the 80/20 rule? Eighty percent of the work of the church is done by twenty percent of the people? Well at the rate you're going, that twenty percent will be out of work!*



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