

Heaven On the Floor

by Molly Keegan Kuhn

Lilly held the blur in her hand. The blur was gray with sparkly, jubilant critters inside. It held her soul. It held tomato juice on Sundays, sparkly pink Cinderella shoes, and nametags like *hello my name is Lilly*, a Mexican charm bracelet. It held sunshine, and a star bright. It was light, airy like a feather. Comfortable. She could wear it as a book bag. She could wear it as a dress. She could tie a string to it, let one end float, and let the other kiss her wrist.

In the blur she met Joseph. Joseph was the priest who lived in the attic of the church. She met him after she grew boobs and thighs that moved like dragonflies soaring above ponds. She met him when she was praying, "Please God. Please don't let it escape." Confessing a guilt that had quite definitely poisoned her blur. She had breath that was pungent like daffodils and freckles that were simple like planets. And the priest was young and naïve, and talked a lot about himself. "I am priest. I love myself." Which is basically what Lilly heard.

He took Lilly upstairs after he found her. Kneeling on a bench, making herself wet with her own tears. Laid her down. And told her stories of Mexico. Arizona. Cape Cod. Cities he lied about. Why he became a priest. *Why did you?* She asked. *I wanted to find God.* He answered. She didn't believe him. He didn't believe himself. He told her about banana cream pie, roller-skating, the hot nuns he'd have sex with if they weren't nuns, and the saints he worshipped. He smoked a cigarette with his feet up, with a gold cross hanging off his desirable smooth chest. He twisted his fingers into her palm and she twisted her body into his. Each night he'd steal the fruit from the fathers, steal the candles from Mother Mary, make her a dinner

using the money from the basket, and they'd take baths in the Baptism pool.

As she dipped her feet in the water Joseph stated, "A pretty fat baby was in this pool today. They dunk him in, and he floated to the bottom. He nearly drowned."

Lilly laughed, "Really? Did they just let go?"

"Yeah, it was nuts. I was trying to say the prayer or whatever, and down he went."

"I was never baptized."

"Do you want to be baptized?"

"Right now?"

"I'm a priest. I could baptize you."

"Right now?"

"Yes. Right now. You can commit to the first sacrament. It'll be fun."

She giggled, "Fine."

"Well, say it nicer."

She gawked, "Like what?"

"Just say it like you really want to be baptized."

"I want to be baptized."

"Eh."

"Damn it all! *I really* want to be baptized."

He stood there, tapping his foot like a pretentious jerk.

"I'll flash you?"

He laughed, "That's the holy spirit."

She lifted up her shirt. He closed his eyes, "I was joking."

She jumped, studied the bubbles, she thought *wow. I'm engulfed in Jesus water. I'll go straight to heaven if I drown.*

She floated to the top.

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

He took two different oils and began roughly massaging them over her spine.

"Do you really do this to babies?" she asked shivering.

He handed her a towel, "Yes. And this is your shawl. To represent Christ.""

"Really? Do babies get such a gentle treatment?"

"I'm not answering that."

Lilly smiled, "I'm going to tell you today."

"What?"

She shook her head, "I can tell you today."

"Tell me what?"

"Why I came to the church."

"...Why today? What's so special about today? Is it because you got baptized?"

"No. It's just a good day."

She felt clean. Her soul felt renewed, whether it was because of the baptism, or because of the way he looked in that robe. One or the other.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it's really important to me. I want to tell you."

He sat down. She sat down next to him. He took off his sandals and moved his feet around in the pool.

"You trust me?"

"You *are* a priest. Who'd be better? You'd go to hell if you told anyone."

"Lilly."

"What?" she grinned.

"I don't want to know right now."

"Why?"

He held his hands up in an *I don't know* sort of way. She smiled curiously, "All right. I'll tell you a different day."

While she slept on his mattress he spent the night gathering the various angel statues. At least the ones he could carry. He knew she heard him, but she kept her eyes closed. *As long as her eyes were closed.*

He opened the big red curtains and unveiled a chandelier sky. He collected all the incense. He garnished the ground with Easter flowers. He took sparkling grape juice from the charity fridge and shook her awake.

“Open your eyes.”

She opened, “Jesus.”

He smirked, “Do you like it?”

Her eyes glittered, “This is beautiful.”

He sat down pompously, “Now. Confess your sins.”

“Why'd you do all this?”

“People tell me all sorts of things...Boys tell me they kick their brother. Mothers tell me they hate their children. Children tell me they spit in their mother's cereal. Girls kill their babies with hangers and alcohol. Men murder their dogs when their drunk...People do terrible, horrible things. And when I forgive them, I forgive them in a dark creepy box. The moment they feel relieved I want them to walk out into purity but they never do. They walk back into the life they came out of. It might be lighter out there at first, but eventually it gets dark again. I don't want the same for you. I want you to tell me and then I want you to be faced with this.”

“Thanks,” and that's all she could say.

He took her hand and together they marched down the spiral steps, into the church, into the confessional, and sat down.

“In the name of the father, and of the son and of the holy spirit...it has been five years...”

“Five years!” he exclaimed, “Sorry. Go on.”

“It has been five years since my last...”

“Just skip that. Go ahead and tell me.”

She sighed heavily. He waited.

She didn't speak.

She yawned.

“Well?”

“I'm just trying to think of the right words.”

“Take your time. I've heard it all. You're a good person, that's all that matters.”

"I slept with Father José."

He was startled, "What?.."

Inside it was *what the fuck Father Jose? When? When was this? Oh my God. That's disgusting. What is he like sixty-three years old? The church is going to shit.*

"I'm just joking," she laughed.

He put his hand to his head, "Why would you say that?"

She laughed, "I'm sorry. I'll be honest now."

She went silent. How could she tell him? It was so simple, but no, it wasn't simple. How would she do it?

Then they started talking about people's secrets and shows on television. They started talking about ants, discovery, menstruation, ejaculation, "It's sick. It really is." The community. 2012. When the world ends. The bible " *Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.* My mother told this to my father on their wedding day."

And finally she came out of the confessional, "Let me in."

"To mine?"

"Yeah. I don't want to be in there alone."

"Ok."

He opened the door, she sat by his side. He took her hand, "Now tell me."

"There's this quote by Ralph Emerson and he says *for it was not into my ears you whispered, but into my heart. It was not my lips you kissed, but my soul.*"

He smirked, "That's pretty."

Lilly placed her hand on his thigh, put her lips to his ear, "Will you kiss me?"

"Stop messing around," he put her hands down, "Tell me."

"I love you," she said grinning, "That's what I wanted to say."

She waited. He paused, "Be serious."

"That's all. I love you. Stop being a priest. You suck at being a priest. You steal. You massage me with oil. You flirt with me. You want me. I know you want me."

If it wasn't so dark, he could have seen that she was sober...*if he wasn't an idiot* he would have seen that she was sober.

"Lilly. Come on. I want you to be serious...I built that whole freaking garden up there. I baptized you...I. What the fudge. Be real with me."

She frowned. *That was it though. That's what I wanted to say. Was love not enough? What did he want? I would have his babies. I would hold their little hands in my hands, and smile at him as I remembered the nights we made them. One by one. I would cry with him, watch cartoons with him, make him breakfast. I would dress up in sexy lingerie, and sometimes t-shirts. I would yell at him, throw plates at his head, threaten to divorce him...then marry him all over again. I would take his hand, and run his fingers through my mane. I'd make love to him in the confessional. I'd soften him when he was angry. I'd marry him right here in this church. How is this not enough? I am vulnerable, I am giving away everything. I am prone to rejection. I love him. What does he expect? What did he expect me to tell him?*

"Well, what did you expect?"

"Come on, you know. The reason I brought you upstairs. The reason you came here crying."

Is he gay? Are you gay? Oh my god he's gay...

"Are you gay?"

"Oh..." he smiled, "*Your* gay. Don't even worry about it. It's all just bullshit. The bible never said that. People just make shit up. I mean stuff. Murder would be acceptable if you took the bible literally."

"No," she folded her hands, "I'm not gay. I'm not gay at all. I'm attracted to men." *Priests actually. I'm attracted to priests.*

"If you're not ready to tell me...it's fine."

He began to get up, but she pulled him back down.

"All right," she said, as the blur moved out, slowly retreating in solitude "I'll be honest."

Only she wasn't being honest. Her guilt wouldn't fix anything and it wasn't what she wanted him to know. Fuck it though. She thought. At least the sad story will keep him here.

When she spoke the prettiest blue birds fell out of her mouth and sat on his chest. Tears slipped from her eyes onto his robe. He held her in his arms, trying to be God. But he couldn't be God.

"You didn't do anything," he held her face in his palms, "That wasn't your fault."

But she didn't believe him and he knew that she wouldn't.

After her tears died down, he carried her up the spiral steps, into the attic where the angels sat. Their eyes leapt open, trying to figure out what was going on. The roses had blossomed. Their buds bloomed into the size of elephant heads. The angels were glowing, with eyes that sparkled like foil; the candles were bleeding white ponds, where speckled fish swam in circles. The stars above were cleared and in place of stars danced twirling multicolored diamonds.

She laughed into his shoulder, "What is this?"
He shook his head, "God or drugs. One or the other."

And on their shoulders they grew wings and flew into space, and all that haunted her was void. The end. At least that's what he imagined as he held her close. And if he was God he would stitch the feathers on. And if he were man he would marry her, kiss her passionately, and do more than just hold her. If he wasn't ashamed he'd tell her how he felt, but he didn't believe either God or himself could find the courage.

In the morning he watched the blur descend from her pores. He held out his hands out to her, "I tried. I really did." But he couldn't stop the blur from descending. He tried to push the blur back in, but it wanted to leave. She left the church and started wearing hoop

earrings. She grew her hair really long and started saying *like* a lot. She stopped praying and she began eating heath bars for dinner. Not much had drastically changed, although she gained a little bit of weight, and stopped riding bicycles. She had five children and a lizard. Her freckles turned into cancer that ate her for lunch one afternoon. And Joseph buried her.

“In the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit. Amen.”

He put his wrinkled hand on her chest and kissed her hard. He kissed her like she wasn't a pasty, crumpled dead woman. He kissed her like he had wanted to for thirty-four years. He put his tongue in her mouth, jumped over her body, and pushed her chest into his. The altar boys gawked. The audience gasped. The priests jolted from their red chairs and pulled him away. He smiled foolishly. “I've been waiting- for so long -to do that.” They smacked him hard across the face, but because he was senile they forgave him. “I would go farther if I could,” he said, “I'd do just about anything.”

And as her body melted into the ground the blur sunk back in. Her bones brushed the skin off, the birds turned her hair into a nest, and ants ate her eyes for soup.

Her soul rose to the heavens. With gray sparkly jubilant critters inside.

