

The Conversion

by Sheila Luecht

She was caught between two different worlds. Her feet marginally planted opposite each other in both, but in reality in neither. It was a confusing place to be. When she was brought up, she had the audacity to doubt many things, sure only that she doubted. That was not how it was at first. At first, in the simple child like nature of a believer, she trusted. She believed what she was told. She marveled at the miracles, the stories of destruction, the fear and the joy of being a good and bad little girl. One could be redeemed, and wasn't that a lucky thing if you wanted to be in Heaven? You could mess up but you could be forgiven, you could say you were sorry and you could have it all erased. Fantastic.

She recognized opportunity in all of that. She could do what she needed to do and it was all good, all the time. She just had to make it to confession, repeat the words, mention a few sins, and bingo, a clean slate. Even she knew it was too good to be true. Her mind could figure it all out so easily that she knew, for a fact, that there was something amiss with it all. She was very bright for her age. As time went on, she became even brighter. She didn't do terrible things, but she learned to navigate the world by omission. If she was quiet and observing, she would learn most things, valuable things. She would know when to comment, when to act like she knew something and who would ever know she was quiet out of fear of being found to be ignorant.

Such is the life of a cloistered child. You did not interact and you were never accepted by your peers, but the adults, well, you could just be invisible and learn so much. Consequently, this child could be old before her time, old before her chronological age, and who would miss a real childhood? No one who did, would even know what it was. This advancement of thought and experience, even if it was second hand observations of an old '30's movie; proved a great

template. In the beginning she did advance farther and quicker than her peers. They eventually caught up. They were still framed by their comradic experiences from their formative years; their groups and gangs, they too still fit into the shell of the church.

Her advanced thinking, her waiting, her ability to scan words and actions and interpret did not allow her to be contained in any shell, let alone the church. She was too curious, too mobile in thought, too able to empathize, too inspired to go beyond boundaries.

Some made it their mission to hack away at this facade and tame her like some wild beast. They wanted her mind to be as diminutive as her smile could be. She did not escape unharmed. She became suited to herself only. She no longer tried in any way to fit, she fought the molds they created and kept moving in her own direction. Often forward, sometimes a bit backward, and she rightly scaled her own Mt. Olympus and there she sat with her own gods.

The importance of group think and schooled opinion always missed their mark with her. It was then, almost the biggest surprise in the world, to see her questioning and doubting, overcome with the force of the organized religious response to life and returning her mind to an almost child like need for some dynamic intercession.

Had she finally reached a pinnacle of understanding? Had some strange sauce been poured over her meatloaf, that made her suddenly need this dimension of existence? Strained beyond her usual comfort zone it all came at her at once. Human frailty, the art of dying, the acceptance of a date stamp on one's existence, fear of the unknown, it all left her wandering in that vestibule of renewed faith. What an apparatus this faith is, how it manages to stay in some form, to overcome other versions of itself and often return to the first one, the one which you might have been swathed with at birth.

There was nothing left for her to do, nothing left for her to admit, but she seemed to merely have accepted the conversion for what it was. She was going back to the simple, to the infinite, to the child like faith of her family orientation. No matter how they had lived it or not, it was like a gift found in an estate sale, a bit worse for the wear but still a kind of treasure. That is how she found it.

