

Monday Nite

I made it through Monday, I deserve a medal. I got all my homework done and made it to school. I had to use my mom's foundation to hide the dark circles under my eyes because I haven't been able to sleep well. I keep having horrible dreams. Like in one, Jade was drowning in a tide pool and I was yelling – "Just stand up – it's not even deep!" She called out, "It is deep... too deeeep." Then, she went under and I couldn't see her. But then it was me drowning and she was right, the water was bottomless. Then I saw Michael under the water with me and it was like he could breathe under water. He just looked worried and held out his hand but I was mad at him because I thought it was his fault and I wouldn't take it and I got pulled down by something. Well I couldn't sleep the rest of the night after that. So, what was weird was to see Michael in chapel after that dream. He was sitting by himself, in a back row, looking very serious. So, I sat on the other side and hoped he didn't see me. The service seemed endless and I didn't hear a word. Lucky we don't get tested on chapel – I can see us all taking notes feverishly, some kids taping the sermon! Anyway, when it was over, I noticed I was kinda disappointed... Michael didn't come after me like he used to when I didn't want to talk to him. Also, I was wondering how I was going to get to my job or even if I still had a job.

The day passed. Sean said hi to me between classes. I just nodded and said I was in a hurry. I haven't seen Elena around. I wonder what happened... but I really don't care.

Anyway, I was coming out of my last class and heading toward the phone to beg my mom to give me a ride to work when I saw Michael coming towards me. He was walking really funny, kind of slow and careful, with his feet rolling, like there might be broken glass underneath or I might be a rabid dog. "Hey Rosalind," he said, "wait up a second – aren't you coming to work?"

"Do I still have a job?" I asked him, pretty nervous myself.

"Why wouldn't you? My mom's expecting you. She needs help with the account books really bad," he said.

"Well, I thought maybe since I'm such a sinner that you wouldn't want to associate with me anymore."

"Please don't be sarcastic," he said all worried. "I was going to apologize – I know I was wrong to yell and judge you... I lost it. Besides, we're all sinners."

"Oh, that's good to know," I said. I was still mad at him and not letting him off easy. So, I told him I wanted to work and needed the job. He said my job was not in question and that his pastor had told him he needed to learn to speak the truth with compassion instead of judgment. I told him I pretty much flew off the handle, too, so we almost made it to the shop in an uneasy truce. I said "almost" because when he opened my door for me (yes, he does that!), he asked me if I'd spoken to Jade. I told him I keep trying but her mom says she doesn't feel like talking to anyone. So, he asked me if it was ok if he tried to call her... as if she would talk to *him* when

she wouldn't even talk to *me*. So, I told Michael if Jade wouldn't talk to her best friend, who did everything she could to try to save her, why would she talk to him? Well, right away, Michael got all uncool again and said he was interested in saving her too – her soul – if he could help her do that. I was pretty rude, I guess, I said I thought the issue was Jade's life, not her soul because after all she was in hell any way, imprisoned by her parents, forced to be pregnant when she didn't want to be.

Michael said being stuck with her parents was nothing to compare to real hell and that her soul and the baby's life were what really concerned him and that Jade could bear the consequences of her actions with God's love and help. I just couldn't believe he could be so dense, so I jumped out of his pick-up truck and got myself to the store's office as fast as I could, without looking at him again.

Michael's mom seemed happy to see me and set me up working on her account books – boy the lady really needs help in the math department – no wonder they put up with a pagan sinner like me. Anyway, I quickly forgot about my problems as I buried myself in nice, orderly, predictable numbers. Soon, Jan came back in the room. She said real softly, “Can I talk to you for a minute, Rosalind?” I'm going uh-oh to myself... here it comes – she found out and I'm getting fired.

Actually, it wasn't like that. She said that she noticed Michael had been upset lately and so had I. She said he had told her about the situation with Jade and she could see why we were both troubled. She told me Michael really likes and cares for me a lot and that his face always lit up when he talked about me.

“Not anymore, I bet,” slipped out of me. I was totally squirming inside. She said Michael still liked me but he was confused about the difference between his Christian beliefs and mine. I told her I had never given him any reason to think I was any different than I am. She said that they knew I hadn’t “accepted Christ as my personal savior,” but that was between me and God and their job was to witness His love to me, not judge and “certainly not exclude me.”

I said that Michael was a good friend to me, and so were they, and I really hadn’t wanted any of them messed up in the business with Jade’s pregnancy and her parents.

Jan hesitated and told me that she wanted me to understand something about Michael. She said, of course the Bible clearly forbids abortion, but there was a more personal issue involved for him. I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear it but I couldn’t exactly say that, so I just sat quietly. She told me that when Michael was 12, she had become pregnant. She and her husband were so happy and so was Michael. They had all wanted another child for many years. Well, everyone was really up in the air, delirious with joy about it until Jan’s CAT scan revealed the fetus had a heart defect. The doctor said the baby would probably not survive the pregnancy and certainly not the birth and strongly recommended the pregnancy be terminated. Of course, they didn’t do that, being good Christians and all. Instead, they prayed and prayed and their whole church prayed and there was a “miracle.” The baby was born alive and perfect looking. She was a girl and did have a small heart murmur but the doctors thought it would heal. She was a sweet and lovely baby,

Jan told me, tears falling from her cheeks. It was so weird hearing all this but I was riveted. It was like from “General Hospital.” She told me that no baby was ever more loved and Michael, especially (for a thirteen year old boy) adored her. He carried her around and played with her instead of biking and hanging with his friends. He changed her diapers and walked her back and forth singing when she was teething. The baby’s name was Celeste and they all thought she was an angel. She seemed fine and healthy, though a little tiny and Michael always tried to feed her her favorite foods to “toughen her up.” But, she didn’t toughen, she died suddenly when she was nine months old, when Michael was babysitting her. He thought she was choking on her bananas and he patted her back and she turned blue and died before his mother could even get home from the store. It turned out she hadn’t choked – her little heart was more damaged than they knew and had simply stopped. So, Michael knew it couldn’t be his fault but he was devastated. He couldn’t think of anyone to blame except God, whom he began accusing of performing false miracles and torturing people. Then he decided God couldn’t possibly exist and stopped going to church. He started hanging out with trouble-making boys who smoked all kinds of things, stole stuff and skipped school. Jan and Vik were in grief and didn’t know what to do. He refused to talk to their pastor and sat silently in family therapy, which they tried. About six months later, when Michael was fourteen, his mom got a call from the hospital. Michael had O.D.’d on crystal meth and was in a coma. Jan stopped at this point and was crying so much she couldn’t talk. I gave her a Kleenex and put my arm

around her, really uncomfortable and not able to imagine that Saint Michael was a young bad boy O.D.-ing.

Jan recovered and said it was still hard to remember the time when she thought that she might lose two children in one year. (I silently reaffirmed my vow to never marry and have kids – who needs that kind of pain?) Anyway, her pastor sent his new assistant, who was the same pastor I had met at the barbecue. He stayed and prayed with them for 36 hours, nobody ever leaving Michael alone for a minute. Finally, he opened his eyes and said, “Mom.”

They were all so happy and that night Michael told them he knew he was about to die and he saw Celeste, all in golden light. She was a little girl, singing and skipping and she told him he should not stay with her because she was fine and being taken care of by angels in Heaven. She told him to go back to their mom and dad and grow up and be a good man. She said she loved him and God loved him and everything was all right. She thanked him for being such a loving brother and said she would always be his sister. Then, he woke up and saw everyone praying for him and he was looking down at his body and his bodily eyes were closed. He saw his mom crying and felt so bad for hurting her and so stupid for smoking that poison and nearly destroying his body, which looked pathetic. He asked Jesus to put him back in his body and he promised to be good to his parents and obey God’s law. He said he wanted to tell his mom about Celeste being alive and happy in Heaven. All at once he felt so much pain, he thought he would die in a few minutes but he wanted to tell his mom first. So, he said “Mom,” but that was all he could say. But, he didn’t die, he lived to tell his story

and change his life. He spent a lot of time with that new young pastor while he was recovering and found answers to his many questions and joined the youth group and went back to being a good boy, but much more of a Christian than ever. He had even brought a few of his hoodlum friends into the church. Jan said that Michael had renewed her and Vik's faith, which had also wavered with the death of their baby.

So, Michael had become the saint he is now, except with a strong bias against abortion. He had decided from his experiences, that Celeste was a special gift that had been loaned to them for a brief time. He was glad he had known and loved her and the topic of abortion made him think of Celeste and what would have happened if his parents had listened to the doctor – no Celeste. So, Jan asked me to “Please forgive Michael if he seemed overly militant on the subject.” She was still all tearful and I guess I would have been too, but I don't cry. When Dad moved out, I wasted a lot of nights swelling up my face with tears and one morning I looked in the mirror at my pathetic red eyes and said “No more tears,” to myself. Now I couldn't even cry if I wanted to.

I said I was sorry to Jan about her baby and everything and that I'd been hard on Michael and that I'd had no idea. I just thought he was kind of self-righteous sometimes but now I understood. I hugged Jan and she gave me a big gooey hug back and told me to take a break. So, I didn't really want to hear all that but I did feel softer towards Michael, knowing that he had once been a bad boy and not so perfect.

I found him, unloading stuff from the truck and I approached him and said I was sorry I was so harsh to

him about Jade's situation. He said, "Mom told you about Celeste, huh?"

I said, yeah and I understood his feelings now but Jade's trip was different because she never wanted to be pregnant and was still a kid with no husband. Michael told me that what he learned was that "God doesn't make mistakes and doesn't send us more than we could handle." I really couldn't try to make Michael understand because I could see he needed his beliefs to make it in this insane world. So, I just hugged him, feeling all awkward. He hugged me back strongly – they all do that in his church. It ended up feeling good like when I was a kid and my dad hugged me. I gave him Jade's phone number and told him to go ahead and try to call her. What difference does it make? She won't talk to him anyway. So, Michael took me home after work and I guess we're sort of friends.

Now, it's after midnight. I can't believe I wrote all that but who else could I tell? Maybe I'll get a lot of extra credit for this great sob story. I better sleep or I'll look like I walked straight out of "Night of the Living Dead" tomorrow.