

## Beauty Sleeping

Men blended together after a while. They all had the same arms or legs or torso. Rose never looked at their eyes. She wasn't looking for Prince Charming, and she sure wasn't anybody's princess. She provided a service and was paid for it like a waitress really; Rose told herself as she pulled on her jacket. Walking past the brightly lit storefronts, an ad for a cruise company caught her eye. Dream Big! it read in huge neon letters. Rose stopped and gazed at the image of happy people frolicking on the beach. "Don't dream," she whispered "dreams just hurt you."

"Yes, Mrs. Frederickson I remembered our appointment. I'm just running a little behind today." Pastor Mark said over the phone." He juggled his sermon outline and grande sized cup of coffee. "I'll be right over. I just need to close up the church. In what he prided himself was a super human feat, Mark managed to balance the sermon, planner, Bible, and coffee and push the end call button on his phone before Mrs. Frederickson could start talking about her "lovely niece." All while yanking his office door open. Once in the hall, Mark breathed a sigh of relief. "I can do this. Just two appointments left," he hoped. He'd forgotten that the deacons had scheduled a lunch meeting for that day one of the deacons had called him up from his nice warm bed, and he'd ran into the church in his Darth Vader slippers. He'd decided to stay and finish up some paperwork, which was why he was running late for the forgotten appointment with Mrs. Frederickson. He knew he needed to hire a secretary, but when did he have the time to interview anyone? He sighed again and opened the door to the gym to take the shortcut to his car and was immediately smacked in the chest with a basketball. "Ah yes, open gym is today." Coffee spilled down his shirt and onto his notes. Ten minutes later, Mark had pulled up in front of Mrs. Frederickson's house. He'd thrown on a blue sweater vest that covered the worst of the coffee stains, and his sermon notes were drying in the back seat. He was just stepping out of the car when his phone rang. "Hello, Mrs. Frederickson. Yes, I know I said I'd be right over. There was a small mishap. I apologize, but I am here now. Yes, I am literally standing in your front yard." As Mark walked towards Mrs. Frederickson's front door, he

noticed something odd going on across the street. A young man and woman seemed to be arguing. He shook his head. "Couple's spat," he commented and turned to go inside. But something made him stop and look again. Upon closer inspection, it seemed that the woman was trying to get away from the man. Mark began slowly walking towards them.

"C'mon baby, just once for me?" the man said. He was short and skinny with bushy black hair and dressed in scruffy jeans and a hoodie.

"I'm off," Rose replied icily, trying to walk away. The man was Reggie. He liked to hang around the girls, but he never had any money.

"Ah, couldn't you make an exception for little old me?" Reggie said, clasping her arm tightly, his breath tinged with cheap beer and nicotine.

"I said, go away, Reggie," Rose said, using her free hand to search her pocket for the can of mace.

"Yeah, but you didn't mean it," Reggie whispered, pulling her closer. "I know you. You say no when you mean yes, and yes when..."

"Excuse me sir, but I believe the word no has only one meaning," Mark said, looking down at Reggie. Reggie loosened his grasp on Rose.

"Look here, buddy. This ain't none a your business."

"It's probably not," Mark admitted, "But, regardless, you need to release this woman before I call the police." He held his cell phone at the ready.

Reggie hesitated for a moment, looking back and forth between, Rose and Mark. Finally, he let go saying, "You ain't worth it, you filthy whore." and storming off.

"Are you all right?" Mark said.

"Yes," Rose replied, pulling the hood of her jacket up and jamming her hands into her pockets.

"Do you need a ride to somewhere?" Mark asked. "If he's still around it would be safer for you than walking."

Rose looked him over, trying to decide if he meant it or if he expected something else.

He looked all honest and clean cut, but she'd met plenty of men who could pull off that act. But if she had to choose between him and Reggie, she supposed she 'd go with him.

"Okay, I live over in the Blossom Lane apartments," she replied cautiously, noting Mark's slippers.

"Okay, I know where that is. Just let me get my keys, my car's right over..." Mark stopped and smacked his forehead, "Mrs. Frederickson! I'm really sorry. Would you mind waiting just a few moments. I have this meeting that I've been trying to get to all afternoon. I promise it won't take but a minute."

"Um, yeah, that's fine," Rose found herself saying. Normally she would have just told him to forget it.

Mark smiled, relieved. "Great! You can wait in the car if you want, or you can come in. I'm sure Mrs. Frederickson wouldn't mind. The more people she can get to listen to her the better." he said with a chuckle.

Rose was just about to decline, when a door opened across the street, and an older woman stuck her head out of it.

"Pastor, what are you doing over there?" Mrs. Frederickson shouted across the street.

"Just talking," Mark replied lamely. In all honesty, he had no idea what he was doing. He'd gotten caught up in playing the hero, but now that all the action was over he was a little unsure of what to do next. He had no idea who this girl was. She could be scoping out the houses or planning on knocking him on the head and running off with his car. Before Mark could turn his second thoughts into actions, he found himself being ushered inside by Mrs. Frederickson along with Rose, who had fully intended to wait in the car. But Mrs. Frederickson was a force to be reckoned with in her own right and in two minutes she had Rose and Mark seated on her overstuffed eighties sofa with a plate of warm chocolate chip cookies and two glasses of lemonade in front of them.

"Now Pastor, who is this lovely young woman,?" Mrs. Frederickson asked leaning forward with the air of curiosity usually reserved for her daytime soap operas.

"This is Rose. We met across the street. Rose, this is Mrs. Frederickson." Rose nodded, Mrs.

Frederickson propped her chin on her fist and stared intently at Rose. Then her face brightened,

"I know who you are! You're the new secretary!" Mrs. Frederickson exclaimed happily.

"And you thought you'd bring her by to meet me first!" she said turning to Mark, "That was so thoughtful of you Pastor. You know how I like to have the latest scoop, and you know Margery Dawson was the first to meet the new youth pastor and his wife because she has to mention it at every church supper. But then she has so little to bring her happiness, the poor dear. You know, I was a secretary in my younger days," Mrs. Frederickson said turning towards Rose. "I worked over in that Italian Restaurant on 43rd street, only it wasn't a restaurant then, of course. It was a bank. I met Mr. Frederickson there. He would come in every Friday at three on the dot, and deposit a part of his paycheck. I knew he was the one because my mother always told me to look for two things in a man, financial sense and punctuality and my Albert was just brimful of both."

And that was how Rose found herself working as a church secretary. She kept her other job, of course because no one goes into church secretarial work for the paycheck, but every weekday from 9-1 would find her sitting in the church office. Typing up bulletins, telling the women's Bible study that they couldn't use the youth room on Thursday night because the youth would be using it and typing up a schedule for Pastor Mark. Rose was actually quite good at secretarial work, and she enjoyed it. But she never let herself forget that she didn't really belong with all of the squeaky clean church members.

"Why would I want to?" she used to tell herself, whenever she passed a church or saw someone praying in a restaurant. Who would want to be so fake and judgmental? But the longer she worked at the church, the softer her opinion grew.

Pastor Mark was perfectly happy with Rose's secretarial performance; he now made it to meetings on time and with appropriate footwear, but he still sometimes wondered if he had made the right choice. He alone out of the church knew what Rose's other job was. She'd told him after they left Mrs. Frederickson's. But he had really felt that God wanted Rose to be their church secretary. Also,

Mrs. Frederickson now considered him at least half-way competent, a refreshing change from her usual lament "Pastor Williams was so punctual." Pastor Williams was his predecessor, when no one was around Pastor Mark drew unflattering comics of Pastor Williams. He had seven currently in his desk that he planned on having published posthumously under a pen name. After a particularly stressful morning, Rose walked into his office to deliver the next day's schedule and found him working on one.

"That's funny," she commented, leaning over his shoulder to read the comic.

"Thanks," Mark replied. "Please don't tell anybody about these though. Pastor Williams is like the patron saint of Glendale Baptist."

"My lips are sealed," Rose promised, then shook her head and smiled. .

"What?" Mark asked

"I just wonder what made you want to be a pastor. I mean you do so much for everybody for little appreciation and less money. I just don't get it."

"Well, I actually wanted to be a superhero, but apparently you need powers for that so." They both laughed a little.

"Honestly, the reason I decided to become a pastor was because I wanted to make a difference. Jesus had made a difference in my life, and I wanted to help others to see how He could change their lives too." Rose had started fiddling with her long blonde hair, and Mark could tell he'd made her uncomfortable. "Sure, it can get kind of stressful sometimes, but hey, that's what Pastor Williams is for." Mark smiled and moved over. "Do you have any suggestions for this one? I call it The Nine Levels of Boredom with Pastor Williams."

After that Mark and Rose found themselves spending quite a bit of time together, one day Rose came in looking as if she'd been crying. She didn't look at Mark, just took off her coat and sat down at her desk. Mark sat for a few seconds, uncertain of what to do before walking over and asking if she were okay.

"I'm fine," she said stiffly, shuffling papers.

"Are you sure?" Mark asked. Rose looked up, and the expression of care in his blue eyes broke her. As she started sobbing again, Mark put his arm around her. At first, Rose stiffened, but then relaxed into the embrace.

Mark walked out of the office a few minutes later, slightly dazed. Rose had calmed down although she still refused to tell him what was wrong. But Mark had realized something during that hug that he hadn't admitted to himself before. He was just heading out to his car when one of the Elder's stopped him.

"Mark," the man said hesitantly. "We have a problem." Apparently someone had found out what Rose's other job was. Mark sent Rose home and spent the rest of the day fielding phone calls and visits from irate church members. At 6:00 that evening, he called a church-wide meeting. When everyone had found a seat, he noted ironically that there were far more people at the meeting than ever showed up for the worship service on Sunday. Taking a deep breath, Mark walked up to the pulpit and started listing scripture references. When he'd finished, he asked the congregation,

"Do you know what all of these verses have in common? They are all the times that Jesus spent time with someone most of us would deem a sinner. I encourage all of you to review these; I have been." Mark paused, "As most of you know I hired Rose as our secretary a couple months ago, fully aware of her other occupation." There was a murmur from the crowd, "However, I still hired her because I felt led by the Holy Spirit to do so, and I do not believe that this was a mistake. I know my choice was rather unorthodox to say the least, but I have seen more ministry occurring since Rose came here than I had seen in my previous three years. But I also apologize for not fully involving you in this ministry and trusting that you would treat Rose with grace. I ask you now to please allow me the opportunity to fix this and show Rose love and grace from the whole body of believers here at Glendale Baptist."

Rose was sitting around the bar at the hotel with a few of her colleagues. They were laughing and talking, but Rose felt strangely separated from it. It all seemed so fake. She had always believed that

all that mattered in life was survival if one managed to be happy for a little while that was an bonus, but not to be expected. But she'd seen a different kind of happiness at Glendale. A joy that people found from being alive, serving others and serving God. During her time as a secretary, Rose had come to trust and maybe even love some people. She'd seen that there was more to life than just survival; now all that was left for her to do was chose. Would she allow herself to wake up and risk being hurt or would she just continue to sleep? Rose slipped quietly off her bar stool and headed for the door.

"Hey Rose, where you going?" one of the girls called to her but Rose didn't answer, she wasn't entirely sure herself. She'd become a prostitute when she graduated high school because it paid better than anything else she could do. Her mom didn't have enough money to send her to college, she barely had enough to support herself. It had even been a little fun at first, dressing up being treated to a higher lifestyle than she had ever known as a kid. But it had worn on her, she would have left it a long time ago but for the money. She was terrified of being poor again. Rose stopped and found that she was across the street from Glendale Baptist. Did she dare go in? She knew they must have found out by now. Did she even want to go in after what had happened? They're all just a bunch of hypocrites, whispered a small voice in the back of her mind. It was only one guy; she thought in defense. One that you know of, the other voice asserted. Rose stared at the church for a few moments and then turned away, but as she was about to take the first step she stopped.

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. The scripture memory verse she had had printed in the church bulletins suddenly came to mind. Taking a deep breath, Rose crossed the street and headed towards the church.

Pastor Mark was the last one at the church, after the congregational meeting there had been a meeting of elders. Dr. Harris was the first to stand up and speak, announcing that the majority of the congregation had voted to keep Rose. Then the elders took a vote, the vote was almost unanimously for Rose to stay on, except for Donald Ferguson, who refused to meet anyone's eyes and was more than usually red about the face. In the end, it was decided that Rose could stay on though Mark was

told not to make a habit out of hiring non-Christians. Mark sighed as he went to lock the front door. He was thankful that Rose was allowed to keep the position and glad to see the grace and love exhibited by the Church, but he didn't even know if she would want to come back. He was also fairly certain that they were going to have to have another meeting of the elders soon to decide whether or not Donald Ferguson was going to be allowed to remain on the board of deacons. It was while he was thinking about the extra uproar and drama that would add to his little church that he noticed a woman coming up the stairs. Mark opened the door and looked out at Rose; they stared at each other for a little while before Mark smiled and welcomed her inside.

"I'm sorry..." Rose began, but Mark cut her off.

"It's okay, the Church took a vote, and we want you to stay, we've never had a better secretary. That is of course if you want to stay, after what happened I can understand if you don't." Rose stood silently, twisting a strand of her long blonde hair around her finger, and then she looked up at Mark,

"I would like to stay. I... I want to know how to find rest."

Mark stared at her in surprise for second and then smiled,

"I think I know someone that can help you with that."