ENOUGH

(included in *Blue Lion Days*)

SHE WAS THE pastor's daughter, but Timmy didn't know that yet. He opened his eyes one night during praise & worship and there she was. Long red hair, hand curled around the microphone. Tall. He recognized her from AA. When had she come on stage? She sang *Way Maker* with the worship team, and Timmy's heart pulsed into his fingertips. Her voice was an earthy, on-pitch alto.

You don't fall for someone in your meeting—Timmy hadn't. But inside Faith Church his love of the Spirit billowed into love for her. He felt excited and confused. Convicted. *Way maker, miracle worker. Promise keeper, light in the darkness.* Her hand on the mic brought to mind a seashell. He knew her name. Sylvie.

When he was using and something churned him up inside, he'd have gone off with a couple of fifths and some crystal. That would've taken care of him for days. He'd have been leveled and sexless when he came to himself again. This time, he had 113 days clean.

After the service he knew he should leave. He went to the front of the sanctuary instead. Up on stage Sylvie was talking with the other singer. Her freckled calves were eye level. Eventually she looked down. "Hi," Timmy said. Sylvie said hi back. The look that passed between them was both fear and understanding. Timmy's fingertips kept pulsing. He'd found a meeting outside Grand Falls where no one would know him. Likely so had Sylvie.

The lights dimmed as she walked offstage with the team. Timmy got in his pickup, drove along the Mallagontic and home to his apartment above the Dairy Joy. He thought about going down to the river walk but opened his windows instead. Good spring air, even with the whiff of mill.

He hated Faith Church, parts of it. He was there only because he couldn't not be. One night last winter, alone, he'd pulled into the parking lot. Inside, he was meaning to leave when he sat down instead. People sang and prayed, cried. Timmy cried too. Afterwards he was sheepish and different.

That was three months ago. He'd kept going back. Something was there, call it the Holy Spirit, call it Jesus the radical who washed the feet of the poor. And he'd met some good people. But the fake holiness—men he knew sitting in the pews who misused their wives, women who didn't do right by their husbands and kids. The manager at Wendy's who'd fired him when Timmy was in rehab was an usher. Maybe Jesus would actually return and know what to do about how things were.

After he saw Sylvie, Timmy texted his sister *Someone from my meeting at Faith tonight, I like her*. Leah wrote back *Go easy*.

Timmy understood—his meeting and what could happen if he and Sylvie started something that didn't go well. But he sidestepped that thought, the way he did now whenever the world's heaviness, or his own, descended. He smoked a cigarette out on the porch and prayed for letting go. Put on early Linkin Park from when they were alternative. He ate some toast.

Sylvie didn't show up at AA on Friday. But Tuesday evening she was back at Faith. She came out and joined the P&W team like before. *Break Every Chain*—she sang harmony. People around Timmy lifted their arms and swayed. So did he. He felt the Spirit through her, genuine. He was rebuilding a life from brokenness. Apparently so was she. The thought made him fractionally braver than last time. After the service he went to the stage. "Can I buy you coffee?"

"Yes," Sylvie said. "Thanks." Her cheeks and her lips were the same color.

Down on the first floor, there was a line outside His Goodness Cafe. Timmy and Sylvie stood together quietly. He had so much to say, he could hardly say anything. Faith Church was three stories, with rows of auditorium-style seats in the sanctuary. Nothing like the old steepled churches around Grand Falls. Pastor Mac was in line behind them, laughing with some people. He always seemed happy, sometimes too much so. That kind of happiness could make another person's troubles weigh more. It did Timmy's.

Sylvie asked for cappuccino extra foam, he got a coffee. They sat. Late-day sun angled through the windows and onto the floor. Timmy imagined Sylvie singing just for him. Imagined driving with her in the passenger seat of the truck. That's when Pastor Mac came over. He leaned down and hugged her. "Hello, sweetie!"

"Hey, Dad."

The pastor's daughter in AA. So at least part of that cheerfulness was a front. Pastor Mac reached out to shake. Friendly yet firm. The look in his eyes said father-with-a-daughter. Timmy sat straighter, glad he'd worn a white shirt and blazer with his jeans, glad his missing teeth were molars. He wasn't what he'd been, but he still presented. He was 28.

After Pastor Mac moved on, Sylvie said *you didn't know he was my dad*, and Timmy said he'd only started coming to Faith in January. She asked what he did, and he told her the journeyman program at JobWorks. Electronics. But that he wanted to open a bakery—"It's what I'd really like to do." Timmy hadn't told anyone that before. He was glad to have it out there for Sylvie along with his AA self.

She'd grown up just outside Grand Falls, homeschooled with other church kids, she said. Graduated college last May. She'd begun drinking her last year there. She sipped her cappuccino, licked foam from her lip. Told him she'd come home from a mission trip to Bosnia last summer knowing she needed help. Timmy knew the rest from meetings: she'd quit drinking, cold, on New Year's and joined AA. She had almost five months sober. The rest of her family didn't drink.

"I love Bosnia," Sylvie said. "Next week I'm going back."

Something then about teaching English there for the summer, but Timmy couldn't hear over the noise in his ears. *Leaving.* When Sylvie reached out and touched his arm, current flowed to his shoulder. Chairs were going up on the tables. "I guess it's closing time," she said.

Timmy woke the next morning knowing he could wait for her. He prayed, still a little awkwardly, *Thank you, Jesus, for your presence in my life.* Sometimes the idea of grace overwhelmed him, sometimes it brought peace. This time, both at once.

He saw Sylvie once more before she left, at AA. While everyone shared, her face animated in the way of people more interested in others than in themselves. Timmy memorized her eyes, her mouth, the hollow at the base of her throat. Afterwards in the parking lot, he wished her a good trip. "Take care of yourself over there," he said.

Sylvie smiled. "You're a sweet guy, Timmy." He wouldn't have said that about himself, but he was glad she thought so. They stood for a few seconds. Then she opened her car door. Timmy chose trusting she'd be back over asking for the actual date. He said goodbye. He had 125 days clean and sober.

In the weeks that followed, he kept Sylvie with him at JobWorks and at home. Mostly chaste thoughts: he imagined sex with her, sure, but often what came to mind was sitting shoulder to shoulder at Faith during worship and going out afterwards to eat. He wanted to tell her about his mom, who still lived in the doublewide where they'd moved after his dad left. She'd pretty much given up parenting when he and Leah hit their teens, and she drank close to black-out sometimes, but Timmy loved her. The idea for the bakery had come when he went over to his mom's place one day and it was clean and she'd made bread, and the homey smell said they'd both be okay. He wanted to tell Sylvie about that.

By now it was full-on spring—breezy-cool and the grass out. Usually spring was a season that belonged to other people, but this year was different. Timmy set chairs on his porch, which looked out over the street; he picked up his bass and began practicing. He went to meetings—daily when he was lonely or too much in his head.

The feeling for Sylvie stayed. It had been a while since Timmy was interested in a woman when he wasn't high. When he was using, it was sex. Sober, it was complicated. Sober, he could be intense. His whole life, his expectations of others had followed him like a dog. Disappointment, too. Which was why he'd started using in the first place.

But that spring the dog was calm, not desperate. One Tuesday after P&W, Timmy went down front and asked if they could use anyone else on guitar. *Yes.* So now that was Sunday afternoons: learning the bass lines to praise songs. The first time he played live with the band at a Tuesday service, it felt right. He thought about Sylvie coming home and them being onstage together.

He still couldn't tell the gospel of Luke from those of Matthew and Mark, and Jesus-is-the-only-way passages gave him trouble. But Pastor Mac's sermons about renewal sounded different knowing he was Sylvie's father. And the music: *Who the Son sets free, oh is free indeed. I'm a child of God, yes I am*. Jesus had always been a symbol, now he felt real. Timmy understood why Faith was packed on Sundays. Before that Chinese company bought the mill two years ago and started renovations, it had been all but gone, the town hollowed out. Faith Church had made people feel things could get better again. And slowly, maybe, they were: machines reopening, people moving back to town or coming north from cities. But there was still an undercurrent of loss.

You think too much, the P&W drummer told him when Timmy talked about this. Timmy laughed—he did. The drummer said, *It's simple. All of us are sinners, we have to step away from pride.* The drummer's name was Rick. Timmy liked him, so he went along.

But he thought: it wasn't sin as much as it was that too many people in Grand Falls had forgotten who they were. If you asked Timmy, it came down to the mill calling the shots all those years, giving workers and their families enough to keep them quiet, then cutting jobs when profits dropped. Grand Falls had been hurt, and people went to Faith looking to fill themselves back up.

Including him. His father had waited two years to get rehired after the mill laid him off. The rest of the family waited with him. Dinners out and trips to the coast ended. His father grew mean. Then he left. Timmy's mom signed up for TANF, but it wasn't enough. She started shopping the Dollar Store for real. Mac and cheese for a quarter. Liter of Sprite, 99 cents. Eventually she found a job waitressing. Timmy and Leah carried each other the best they could, which wasn't very well. Timmy skipped school. Leah stopped eating for a while. He was using by fifteen, out of school and on probation by seventeen. Probation—he'd driven too high one night. Then he screwed that up and got sent to jail.

If you were lucky and lived long enough, you eventually realized you had to get to know your need and carry it. The first time Timmy got sober, he'd been pissed whenever he heard a high-end engine below his apartment. It meant Bix or another dealer trolling downtown. Timmy wanted them gone. But even without them, others would move in. Or people would cook for themselves. In the end, you had to want to get clean, bad, and know it would be hard. You could still get overtaken; Timmy had relapsed three times. Now whenever he heard Bix, he prayed for the need to lessen—in Grand Falls and in him.

Mid-July: AA almost every day, JobWorks, Faith on Sundays and Tuesday nights. Grand Falls was at its best in summer, trees leafed out along the river walk, flowers planted downtown in half-barrels. Once in a while Rick came over. He was sober, too, so it worked. Timmy mixed Nestea and served chips with dip, then they jammed out on the porch and smoked. Rick could pick up songs and sing them, which meant Timmy sometimes got to sit and listen. At least until dusk, when the mosquitos drove them back inside. Rick played P&W, and also pop. Weird how much they were alike. Take John Rzeznik's "Iris": *And I don't want the world to see me. 'Cause I don't think that they'd understand. When everything's made to be broken, I just want you to know who I am.*

Listening, Timmy thought about Sylvie, and he thought about Jesus.

One afternoon while Rick was playing, Timmy got a text. It was her. *Hi Timothy. Hoping you are well and enjoying summer.*

He sucked down the rest of his Nestea to steady himself. Timothy—that part made him smile. Formal. Biblical. He wrote *I'm good. Thanks for your note Sylvie. Hope you're doing well too*. Thought about it, added *You are special* then sent it. Nothing back. Maybe he'd said too much. Or not enough. Most of what he wanted to say would sound weird in a text anyway. Still, she'd reached out.

The first mosquito landed on his arm. Timmy let it bite, watched its belly swell and allowed it to fly unsteadily away. What he'd like to tell Sylvie: that he thought about her a lot. That he couldn't wait to see her. That after he graduated JobWorks in December and got a job, he'd start saving for the bakery. He wondered whether she'd found AA in Bosnia. She'd said her father thought mission work was good because it was outer-focused. Timmy had seen how she listened, though, eyebrows steepled in concern. It wasn't self-absorption that made her drink. But—maybe Sylvie didn't need a meeting. Maybe she had enough else to see her through. Everyone in AA knew some would have it easier than others. Sylvie might be one of them; some folks built to make it, others not so much. In his family, Timmy and his mom had it tough, Leah less so. She'd been using on and off for years and getting by.

That night after Rick left, Timmy got to thinking about what he had to offer Sylvie. Before the mill laid off his dad, he had been a foreman. Along with the vacations, they'd had a three-bedroom house and snowmobiles. After JobWorks, Timmy would likely wind up doing appliance repair in Grand Falls. No union wages there. Even with the town's start-up loan program, it would take years to get the bakery. And his sobriety—knowing addiction was an illness didn't make it

easier to stay clean.

He called Leah at work on the Ramada front desk. *Timmy,* she said. *Just see what happens when she gets back.* Leah was practical and tough. A few weeks earlier they'd met up for dinner then headed to Walmart to buy sneakers for his nephew, Trey. Inside the store, Trey had begged for a Lego. Leah told him no, told him to stop. Trey didn't. So she packed him into the car and drove home. No shoes that night. Timmy couldn't have done it, but Trey wouldn't whine the next time they went to Walmart.

September came, a few leaves on the ground in the mornings. Then one Sunday Sylvie was there at the evening service, sitting up front.

Timmy recognized her hair, even longer than it had been four months earlier. Down to her waist now. Excitement ran through him. *At last*. He considered moving to be with her, but the service was beginning, and anyway he needed time to gather himself. He stood up to sing, sat to pray. His heart drummed. He said, *thank you Jesus*, unselfconsciously for once. Sylvie was back.

He'd only come to the service because he'd played bass at the 11:00 a.m., which meant he mostly missed the sermon. Pastor Mac walked on stage, even more worked up than usual. "I'm here to celebrate our Lord tonight. I think you are too!" Cheers and clapping, a few foot stomps. *Amen. That's right.* Pastor Mac got everyone up and shaking hands. Timmy stood, his eyes on Sylvie, but she didn't turn around.

She was with a brown-haired man Timmy took to be her brother—Rick had said she had two—and a woman Timmy thought he recognized from the church office. Pastor Mac started talking about resurrection and related words that began with *r*. *ReAppear, ReVivify, ReSurge* came up in bullets on the screen up front. "As Christ followers, we must also do this," he said, but Timmy couldn't concentrate. What should he say first to Sylvie? He heard Leah as if she were with him in

the pew: Focus on *her*—and of course that's what he'd do, ask about Bosnia, her teaching, what it was like there. Everything else would wait.

Afterwards he went down front. People were hugging her—Timmy realized how much Faith was Sylvie's. Finally she noticed him. She smiled. Her tan filled in the freckles on her face. "Sylvie," he said. "It's so good to see you." He got the words out easily. Stood square, held himself back from embracing her himself.

A look of caring on her face—but that was all. Things started to go cottony in Timmy's head. Sylvie leaned in. "How are you, Timmy?"

"Doing fine," he lied.

"This is Josip," she said of the man beside her. "And his sister, Rana."

Josip put a hand on Sylvie's arm. Timmy wanted to knock it away. His throat clenched. She was being polite. Four and a half months, and it came down to this?

Sylvie said she was home for two weeks. *They* were, she said.

Timmy left the sanctuary. He had 230 days sober. He hadn't told his sponsor about Sylvie, and now he wouldn't. Didn't want to talk to Rick, either. He went home and sat on the porch, smoked, and when that and a pile of toast did nothing, he got back in his truck and drove to the Ramada. One look at him, Leah knew. *Oh Timmy.* She shook her head, poured them coffee.

"It won't feel so terrible in the morning," she told him, but they both knew it would. "Trey will be with me, but I'll call you," Leah said.

Now the dog that followed him was sullen and reproachful—*it knew this would happen.* Back at the apartment, Timmy's rooms smelled like sour milk from the ice cream downstairs. He opened windows, let in cold air. Got through the night. Morning: a practice run for Homecoming, with bands and cheerleaders and people in and out of Dairy Joy for cones. Timmy stayed upstairs,

the buoyancy more than he could take. Disappointment was turning into anger—at himself, his parents, Grand Falls, not Sylvie.

By mid-day the street was empty. Around 2:00 he heard dual exhaust. Bix down below in his Supra, looking for unmet needs. Timmy felt his own, perilously. His mouth and his eyes watered. He wanted. One time. Wanted. It was never that far away.

Did Bix look up, or did Timmy open the window first? Bix slowed and parked. Timmy sat on the couch. Surrender settled over him.

The dog was bitter. Timmy thought about how he and his mom and Leah never really got it together after his dad left—their dismal little Christmases and birthdays, Thanksgivings with just a roasted turkey breast because the whole bird was too hard—and how much he intended to be a different kind of man from his father. Be someone who stayed. But Sylvie couldn't take the chance, the chances. Timmy understood. How could she? How could anyone?

Bix knocked on the door. Timmy didn't move. "It's open," he said.

Leah stood there. Timmy stared—"You have Trey today."

"Get up, we're going for a ride," Leah said.

Timmy looked out the window. No sign of the Supra. In his mind, he had already used. *She's taking me to rehab.* The familiar shame. He didn't look at her face. In the car he sat silently, only figured out they were on their way to the beach forty minutes later when Leah left the main road and headed down the peninsula.

About ten miles in, the road rose up and the ocean spread before them. It had been Timmy's favorite view since he was a kid. He glanced at Leah. The beach wouldn't do much for him right now. But—*Thanks*, he said, *it's beautiful.* She nodded. This was what they did for each other, stepped up when they could. Out of his apartment, Timmy was relieved it was Leah who had

knocked, not Bix. He didn't want to go to sleep nights with a rocks-loaded pipe beside him for the morning. And he did not want rehab, the tedium, the reminders everywhere that he hadn't made it.

Leah parked in the lot at Beach Eats. Timmy got out, put his hands on the hood and leaned over. He felt weak. The day was clear-skied and warm. Leah touched his back. "Let's go have some clams. My treat."

It was easy to get service this late in the season. They sat out on the deck, with a table of teens and a couple with a baby nearby. The smells of sunscreen and beer made Timmy lonelier. The clams came, fried and steamers. They ate quietly. Timmy waited for Leah to tell him he'd been foolish. Gotten carried away over someone he barely knew.

"How about a walk?" she asked when they'd finished.

The surf was down, tide on its way out. The sand was right for walking. Signs of Sylvie everywhere—the serious blue of the ocean her eyes; the inner shine of shells her skin. Leah picked up the pace. Said she was chilly. Timmy wasn't. He took off his shoes, rolled up his jeans and veered toward the water. Very cold. It was never warm, and now it was on its way back to frigid. Another ten minutes and they reached the open stretch of beach at the state park. The sky was darker now, as if the ocean was sucking away the light along with the water. His feet had gone numb, and he liked that.

On Monday, Timmy would show up at Leah's apartment with a pizza to thank her. He would stay away from Faith Church, but in the coming weeks he'd pray, and the Spirit would still be there.

"Want to run?" Leah asked. "I'm freezing."

Timmy did. The sand was hard underfoot. His feet thawed and ached. The ocean was vast, indifferent, and he liked that too. Leah's arms pumped. Her hair flew back. Timmy got carried along, and the dog was quiet.

It was close to dark by the time they reached the car. And cold, probably in the 50s. Once when he was a kid, he'd stayed in the guest house attached to Beach Eats. One big room, his parents in the bed and him and Leah in bunks. Kitchenette in the corner. By the next summer, his parents had split up.

A gull watched from a piling as Timmy sat down and brushed wet sand off his feet. The tide was on its way back up. Waves crested and drained. Crested, drained.

Leah started the car, and the gull flapped off. "Here," she said. She handed Timmy her travel mug. "It's still hot." He drank, glad for the warmth.

They drove up the peninsula and headed west along the Mallagontic. Dark now, half-moon rising and the river pressing in. Timmy fiddled with the radio. Sampled Adele, Garth Brooks, Beyoncé, Maroon 5. "That's starting to bug me," Leah said.

He switched it off. His mind slid over to Sylvie. How long had she known the boyfriend?

Leah turned up the thermostat. "Nice moon tonight."

Timmy said it was—the silver color. They crossed the bridge at Post Falls, river on the other side of them now and road alongside it.

Two hundred and thirty-one days sober. Timmy finished Leah's coffee, wedged his feet under the heat vent. He thought about making toast when he got home and ordering a bread machine.

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