

## Jesus and Armpit Farts

When I was a kid, my mother and I went to church almost every Sunday. Not fake church either, the real one with marble floors and wooden benches. I liked going to church on Saturday night, because my mom let me wear dark jeans and a nice shirt (it was less formal to praise God at eight o'clock pm rather than am), but we only went when my grandparents said yes to go out to dinner with us. My grandma forgot things a lot and going out for her was hard. They didn't say yes often.

I hated Sunday mornings, because Sunday mornings never went as planned; we always ran late because of ripped nylon tights or orange juice stains or tangled hair. My mom hated being late. We'd always have to park in the back of the church and walk through the lines of cars, passing the empty spot between two stark white lines reading RESERVED FOR JESUS in the front row to get to the doors. She hated walking in her tall nude heels.

Jesus' spot was always empty on Sunday mornings, but at night it was always taken. Jesus must've liked Saturday nights better too.

My mom prayed every night before bed for me to do good in school, for grandma to get better, for her to get a raise. She never prayed for dad, he was never around long enough.

My Uncle Tom, my mom's younger brother, came around a lot. He filled the gap for my mom when she needed the gap filled. He took me to daddy-daughter dances, picked me up from school when mom worked late.

She prayed for Uncle Tom every night.

Uncle Tom wasn't religious. He didn't go to church with us, but my mom always asked, always went through the motions.

“Marla and I are going to church tomorrow morning, would you like to come with us?”

He always said no. It became formulaic, patterned. We asked Uncle Tom to go to church with us, prayed for him at night, went to church in the morning.

“Sure.” He said once.

The next morning, Uncle Tom came to church. We all walked in together, black loafers, pink flats, nude heels.

Mom and I went in first and sat down in our normal booth with our abnormal guest. Service went as usual, but when the choir began to sing their last song, Uncle Tom nudged my shoulder with his hand.

“Pull my finger,” he said, reaching his pointer finger toward me like E.T. The entire church stood up in unison, me and my uncle a beat behind, his finger still outreached towards me.

“Pull my finger,” he repeated with a small grin. I giggled quietly, slapping my hand over my mouth to keep my voice muffled. I saw my mom peek over.

He poked me with it, a look of emergency taking over his face. I clamped my mouth shut, reached over, and lightly tugged, and while the choir entered their final crescendo, he shoved his hand under his armpit and made a farting noise.

I burst out into silly laughter, sitting down in my seat to hide from the glares surrounding me. Expecting a silent shake of the head that promised a conversation later in the car, I looked back over at my mom. I saw her quietly reach her own hand underneath her sweater and let her own armpit fart fly.

My jaw dropped, along with the other regulars surrounding us. I looked at Uncle Tom, expecting to see a shock in his face too, but he just smiled and nodded approvingly. Leaning over, my mom whispered in my ear.

“Jesus likes it when kids laugh, even when it’s armpit farts in the middle of mass.”