

My Dear Jewish Friend

I saw her sitting on the front walkway stairs. She held her walking cane with both hands. She was so fragile and polished, not a hair out of place. She had such a contented smile, one that was so radiant. She had a sense about her that could put your greatest fears to rest. I loved her so much in such a short time.

There are some people we find, who though we don't get a chance to live a lifetime with them, still have this uncanny ability to change our lives forever.

I can't imagine the pain this woman ... Sarah ... endured. Under this soft persona lay an ocean of resentment toward God.

Me: Hello what a beautiful day it is.

Sarah: Yes it is.

Me: I see you every afternoon walking around.

Sarah Yes, I walk 12 blocks two times a day. Once in the morning and once before I go to bed.

Me: And what time would that be?

Sarah: 8 a.m. and 10 o'clock at night.

Me: Aren't you frightened to walk at night?

Sarah: Surely not. I can't let fear stop me from taking my evening walk.

I thought that was an amazing answer. I sat next to her, oh so curious as to who this woman was.

Me: Do you mind if I sit down?

Sarah: Not at all. I would love the company.

Me: My name is Christine. I live on the bottom floor, Apartment One.

Sarah: My name is Sarah. I live on the second floor, Number Eight. How old are you, if you don't mind me asking?

Me: Twenty-seven.

Sarah: How old do you think I am?

Me: Seventy-something.

Sarah: Try eighty-six.

Me: Wow. Those walks do you justice!

Sarah: What is your religion?

Me: I guess I would be considered a Methodist. And you?

Sarah: I am Jewish, though I don't believe in God.

I was taken aback. How could she be Jewish and not believe in God? I found that peculiar, since I thought being Jewish meant the person believed in God.

Me: How can you be atheist and Jewish at the same time? Do you believe in the devil?

Sarah: Of course not. How could I believe in one and not the other?

Me: Well, at least you're fair.

Sarah: If there was a God, He would have never allowed the Holocaust to take place.

I really didn't have an answer for her, and who would? The horrors of the Holocaust were senseless, and to a Jewish person all the more painful.

Sarah: I escaped the Holocaust. Me and my mother went to France, but my father and my brother

...

She lowered her head and allowed her eyes to wander, folding her hands in her lap.

Sarah: They didn't leave with us, and they weren't heard from again. I was too young to know what was happening, but after time I realized that they weren't coming back, and we weren't going to get them. ... I loved my brother he was younger than me. ...

I could see our conversation was getting a bit serious, and she cut it short.

Sarah: On that note, I'll bid you good day. I'll see you later.

Me: Okay. Have a nice day, Sarah.

After a few days, I was aching to talk to this interesting woman again. One day I got that chance. I was looking out my window, and there she was, taking a walk.

Knowing her routine, I sat on the steps, waiting for her return.

Me: Hello. How are you today?

Sarah: Beautiful, and you?

Me: Can't complain. Listen, I'm sorry if I got too personal the last time we talked.

Sarah: Don't be silly. You were fine. Would you like to go upstairs and chat a while?

Me: There's nothing I would like more.

And so we did. We climbed the stairs and walked down the hall to her apartment, which was on the right.

Sarah: Would you mind unlocking the door for me?

Me: Not at all.

Once inside I sat in a recliner without thinking twice.

Sarah: That was my husband's chair.

Me: Would you like me to get up?

Sarah: ... No, that won't be necessary. He died about five years ago.

Me: Sorry to hear that. You must get lonely here, being by yourself. Do you have family?

Sarah: I have a daughter, but she and I don't talk.

Me: What do you do to keep busy?

Sarah: I read from time to time.

Me: I love writing. ... Poetry mostly.

Sarah: I used to read poetry for a living. Let me see one of your poems.

Me: Okay.

I ran downstairs as fast as I could. All I could find was a poem I wrote for children. Once back in her apartment, I was a bit nervous.

Me: Okay, but don't laugh.

She took my poem into her hands and read it out loud. She read it with such emotion that I could hardly believe that these were my words. It was so beautiful although the poem was so simple.

I'm so happy

I can hop like a frog

Or bark like a dog

I can "moo" like a cow

Or "who" with the owl

I can "hummm" like a bee

Or swing from a tree

I can whistle like a bird

Or think things unheard

I can swim like a fish

On my birthday make a wish

I can crawl like a bug

Or give Mom a hug

I can "purr" like a cat

Or squeak like a bat

I won't lie I can't fly

Birds have wings,

But still I can do many things

I'm so happy as can be

It's just great to be me.

Me: I've never heard my words read to me before.

Sarah: You write beautifully.

Me: God gave me the gift of writing.

Sarah: Why do you believe in God?

Me: I know He exists. I saw Him for myself. I can't say that He hasn't disappointed me, but He has definitely proved Himself to me.

Sarah: You have to be dead to see God, and you, my dear, are not dead.

Me: I know, but a few years ago, I took my life. He came to me. I promise I saw Him. He exists. I wouldn't lie to you. Sometimes I scream at Him, but still, I love Him.

Sarah: How dare you scream at God?!

Me: He'd rather me scream at Him than not talk to Him at all. He knows the way I am, and He accepts me in spite of myself. You never talk to Him, do you?

Sarah: He let a lot of people die. People I knew. people I loved. How could He let that happen?

Me: I don't know. Ask Him. Scream if you have to. Cuss, cry, but tell Him. Talk to Him.

Sarah: I don't know what to say to Him.

Me: Then start by saying that. "I don't know what to say to you."

Sarah (smiling): You are wise beyond your years. I'm going to go to bed now.

I excused myself and left. We had quite a few conversations over the next couple of weeks, on topics ranging from God to the meaning of life. I loved her, and we became so close so fast. I loved her intelligence and her poise. She was so elegant, interesting and oh so intelligent, nothing that I had thought a person her age might be.

One day that all changed, and she was no longer.

She knocked on my door.

Me: Just a minute.

I threw on a shirt and some shorts. I opened the door, and there stood Sarah with her cane in her hand.

Me: Hi Sarah, time for your walk?

She smiled at me.

Sarah: I love my neighbor.

Without another word she walked away from my door. I had a warm feeling throughout my body, I knew she loved me.

That next morning, there was a commotion in the hallway of the building. I asked a neighbor what had happened.

Neighbor: That sweet old lady upstairs, you know the one with the cane? She died of asphyxiation. She must have forgotten to turn off the oven. Some say it may have been suicide.

What do you think? Did you know her?

I had this nauseous feeling in my stomach and a sharp pain in my heart.

Me: Yes, I knew her. She was a good friend of mine.

How could she do this? Where is she now? I miss her a lot. Her daughter came to take all of the valuable possessions, but the most valuable she left behind, so I took it. It was her cane, something she kept with her everywhere she went. It was her brace as she walked and her plaything as she sat.

What a beautiful woman, what a terrible loss.