

Second Soprano
(an excerpt from “Choir Girls”)

By Kim Downey

All week I've been waiting for Sunday because neither of us have anything we *have* to do and we've made plans to spend the whole day together, Rich and I. I kept myself busy the whole week so that it would go faster. On Monday I had a pedicure and on Tuesday I evened out my tan. On Wednesday I did laundry because one of Rich's goals for me is to be more like a woman and less like a girl. I'm *trying*. But I had to go to yoga and I forgot to put it in the dryer. Rich got mad because it smelled like mildew when I remembered it the next day. I did it all again and I folded everything but Rich's shirts because I don't know how to when the arms get in the way.

Sunday finally came and the day *started* so well. After church we did it, because God and the beauty of our holy union were still on our minds and we thought it was important to celebrate that. After, Rich showed me how to make scrambled eggs. It didn't look so hard and I promised I would try it next Sunday.

We were hot so we went down to the pool. I sat on the steps in the shallow end because I haven't been able to go into the deep end since I saw a dead mouse floating there. Rich got it out with the net. It was stiff as a board and Rich told me that's what happens after you've been dead a while, which I thought was weird. We buried it behind the pool house and said a prayer for the poor little thing, even though I know that animals don't have souls.

Rich started his laps and I sat there and watched, splashing water on my arms to keep cool. It's funny to watch him because the pool's kidney-shaped so you can do a lap in about three strokes. Every time he came close to me I shouted out “hey!” but he just kept going like he didn't even see me. So I got out and got the book I bought from the church bookstore about improving your soul. I'm on Chapter Two, which is called *An Attitude of Gratitude*, and is about how some people don't even have houses or food so we should be really thankful for what we have. It suggested you make an effort to be grateful for three things each day and that every time you felt grateful you should say it out loud. I wanted to try that. I thought it would please God.

I was lying there by the pool trying to choose my first thing – I couldn't decide if it

was better to be grateful for a whole Sunday off or for the scrambled eggs Rich made me, because I'd said grace before I ate the eggs and I eat every day anyway so it didn't seem that special, so it was better to be grateful for the day off and then more days off would come – when Rich stopped doing his laps and said “Where did you go?” One thing I've noticed about Rich is that he always asks where things are before he looks for them.

“I'm right here,” I said. I tried not to sound mad. He got out of the pool and came over and lay on top of me. “You're all wet,” I said, but then I realized I should be grateful for my husband's affection, so I let him stay there and he put his head between my boobs. After a while it got hard to breathe and I was grateful when the phone rang. I mean, I *really* was. “Thank God,” I said.

Rich grabbed the phone and went into the house. He's always got to make it such a big private thing. While he was gone I figured since I was all wet anyway I'd go into the pool. While Rich was in the house having an oh-so-important conversation I'm not allowed to hear, I thought I'd play this game I made up where I see how long I can hold my breath under water. My personal best is sixty-eight seconds, which is better than my sister's. My lungs are quite big.

I was only at thirty-two seconds when Rich grabbed me around the ankles. I don't know why, because I knew it was him, but I screamed under water and got it up my nose. I came up choking and Rich grabbed me and pulled me close. That made me choke even more, my nose was burning and I had a bit of headache. Sometimes I get one when I play my game.

Rich chewed my neck a bit then squeezed my ponytail the way he likes to. “Trey and I are going golfing,” he said.

“No, you're not,” I said.

“You can come,” he said. “Trish will be there.”

“But this is our day together,” I said.

“We'll play golf together.”

I gave him my look. He knows what it means. “I'm itchy,” I said, and got out. He dove under and his shorts billowed out. “Your ass looks huge,” I said, but he was down too deep to hear.

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“I’m grateful this car has air-conditioning,” I said on the way to the golf course, but nobody said anything. “Because it’s really hot,” I added. I saw Trey look at Rich, but I didn’t care. I was doing well with being grateful so I decided to push it, to go for ten things instead of just three. I took a sip of water and looked out the window. “I’m grateful for the sunshine and the birds,” I said. But I didn’t count it, because I didn’t really mean it. I took another sip. “I’m grateful for all the clean water we have in this country,” I said. I read that in Africa cows go to the bathroom in the river upstream from where people do their laundry and stuff, and I thought that was pretty gross.

“Will you shut up?” said Trey. I knew his soul wasn’t anywhere near as advanced as mine.

“Well, I am,” I said. “I need to go to the store.”

“What store?” Rich said.

“The golf store, Dummy.”

Trey turned around suddenly and I thought he was going to have an accident. He pointed right at me and said, “A, it’s called the pro shop, and two, we’re not going.”

I just ignored him and sipped my water. “I’m grateful we didn’t just have an accident,” I said, and Trey slammed on the brakes, right there in the middle of the road.

“Come on, man,” said Rich. “She’s just trying to get at ya.”

That made me kind of annoyed because that wasn’t what I was doing at all. Rich must have felt bad when we got to the course, because he said I could spend a hundred dollars. Trey and Trish went ahead and Rich came in with me.

I looked around for a little while, but it was kind of confusing. I found some cute pink golf balls, a set of wooly cozies for Rich’s clubs, and two bottles of water. I took them all to the counter and I think the clerk recognized me because he smiled. Rich told me that I need a glove, so he showed me a white leather one and I tried it on. It was the softest thing I’ve ever felt. I rubbed it against my face.

“They should make beds out of this,” I said. Rich smiled. He’s happy when I’m happy. I took the glove to the counter. The clerk started ringing it all up.

“Whoa, whoa, buddy,” I said, holding up the glove. “Aren’t you forgetting something?” He gave me a look. “The other *glove*,” I said.

Rich grabbed the glove and nodded to the clerk. “You only need one,” he said.

I looked at him. I looked at the clerk. “I’m not stupid,” I said.

“No one’s calling you stupid.” Rich gave the clerk some money and told him to keep the change. He started to leave. I didn’t budge. “Come on,” he said. “We’re late.”

I said, “I’m not leaving until I get my other glove.”

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Trish and Trey were already at the third hole by the time we caught up with them. I was all sweaty because Rich practically made me run and I wished I had peed earlier but there was no way we could go back. Rich was all pissy he missed a couple of holes, which I didn’t understand because they were playing eighteen of them, and two out of eighteen isn’t, like, even close to half. I didn’t try to explain it to him though because I didn’t want to embarrass him in front of his friends.

I sat on a bench and sipped water while Rich took his shot. The ball went flying and I thought it looked good, but he swore out loud.

“It looked good to me, baby,” I said. I really try to be supportive.

“Well, it wasn’t,” he said, looking at me as if it was my fault. He swore again. Trey looked at Rich and pointed a club at me.

“Is she playing or what?” he said.

“You playing?” Rich said. I shook my head.

“She has to play,” said Trey. “They don’t just let you walk around.”

“She can tend the pin,” Rich said. “She can be my caddy.”

“Whatever, man,” Trey said, and he passed his club to Trish. She’s only played a little, but she’s pretty good. When she took her shot it went even further than Rich’s. Rich whistled. “Nice one,” he said. Trish smiled.

“I want to try,” I said. I put on my gloves and Trish gave me her club. She stood behind me and put her arms over mine to show me how to use it. “Just pull back and swing,” she said. I did that, but I just ended up swiping grass.

I looked at Rich. “I think my boob got in the way,” I explained. “How are you supposed to swing around your boob?” I asked Trish. Then I looked at her chest and I felt bad.

“Forget it,” said Trey, coming up and grabbing the club. “She’s Rich’s caddy.”

“Give her a break. It’s her first time,” said Trish. I was grateful for that, but I was more grateful that Trey wasn’t going to make me play because it wasn’t much fun.

“I *want* to be the caddy.”

“Great,” said Rich, holding out his bag.

“What’s that for?” I said.

“The caddy carries the clubs,” he said.

“It’s too hot to carry your stupid clubs.”

“That’s the caddy’s job,” said Trey. “Carry them or go home.”

I took the clubs. “But I’m hot,” I said. Rich kind of waved at me like he was *done*, you know, and all of them just starting walking ahead to their balls. “I have to pee,” I said. They just kept walking, too fast for me to keep up. I stopped to sit and splash some water on my face. Then I was afraid to stand because I thought I’d wet my pants if I moved.

“I have to *pee*,” I shouted. I heard Trey swear real loud and he sort of slammed down his club. Rich threw down his club too and came marching right up to me.

“That’s it. You’re going home.” He grabbed me under the arms and tried to pull me up, but I stretched out my legs and lay down. He kept trying to pull me up, getting angrier all the time, and that made me laugh. “It’s not a goddamned game. You’re staying here,” Rich said. “I’m leaving, you spoiled brat.”

No, no, no, I wanted to say. I’m not spoiled, I’m *grateful*.