And So It Goes

There was nothing special about the day. I can't tell you the date, or whether it was fall or spring semester, but I was in college, and I will remember it the rest of my life.

When I got off work I would go to campus and study in the smoker's lounge of the Library. Someone had tipped me off about it. There were comfortable chairs with bathrooms right across the hall. The lounge and bathrooms were the only accommodations in the basement and there were no signs directing you to either of them. If you didn't already know it was there, you would never find it because few ventured to the "subterranean" level. I was frequently the only person there. I liked the quietness of the room and the comfortable chairs.

On this particular day, I had taken my books into the lounge and placed them next to my favorite chair, then went across the hall to the rest room. When I came out she was coming down the hall. I recognized her instantly from the biology class we had both taken the previous semester. I had always admired her but we had no friends in common to introduce us. It was a time when women lived with the angst of society expecting them to wait for the man to ask them out and men lived with the angst of approaching the woman and running the risk of being shot down.

She was in the sorority which dominated the center tables in the school cafeteria. I would see her there with her sorority sisters when I ate lunch. She was always engaged with everyone around her, not as the center of attention, but as a member of a group that clearly liked each other and enjoyed each other's company. I was an outlier at a school that most of my friends did not attend and because I worked I did not have the opportunity to stay on campus after classes and meet people.

She reminded me of a song which, in describing the object of the singer's affections, tells us that "she wasn't quite as pretty as some others I have known." Nevertheless, I had noticed that when this woman smiled her face lit up and she was beautiful. Also, as I was to learn on this day, she belied the next line of that song which stated, "she wasn't good at conversation when we were alone."

If the hall had been narrow we would have bumped into each other but since there was plenty of room, we managed to maneuver around the other. Who said "hi" first is one of

the mysteries of the day, but we both acknowledged the other. She almost walked on, then turned and asked if I hadn't been in Dr. Flowers' biology class the previous semester.

"Yes," I replied.

"I remember you from that class."

But how? There were about 150 people in the lecture part, and we were in different lab sections so we only saw each other in the once weekly lecture. Besides, I sat in the back; she was always down front with some of her sorority sisters.

"Wasn't he a great lecturer?" There was the smile I liked so much.

"Yes," I agreed. "And the study tips he gave us at the beginning of the semester really helped me. He's such a great teacher he could teach kindergarteners if he wanted to."

"I know," she practically shouted. "All my sorority sisters tell the new pledges that if they are going to take a science they need to take biology with Dr. Flowers! He's probably one of the best teachers on campus!"

I loved her enthusiasm.

I was about at the end of my social skills, but she rescued me with a question, made more in the form of a statement. "I didn't know you smoked. I've never seen you smoke."

"It's not about smoking. It's about comfort. I think the smoking lounge is the most comfortable place on campus. I have to admit that smoke has permeated the furniture, but there are seldom any others in there, so it's just the odor, not the smoke. Take a look."

I opened the door for her and she looked in. "I see what you mean. This is great furniture! This should be upstairs!"

"It wouldn't work upstairs—there's no room. An advantage to being down here is that it is really quiet. Even when other people are down here they nod to each other then go about their business. Nobody talks except to say, 'hi.'"

“You’re probably right, but I wish they had something like this for non-smokers. I don’t think I could handle the tobacco smell.” She wrinkled her nose. It was a really cute wrinkle. As she stepped back into the hall I closed the door.

“So if you never go in the smoker’s lounge what brings you down here?”

“The bathroom down here doesn’t get used much so it’s a lot cleaner than those upstairs.”

Again, I was at the end of my social skills and again she bailed me out.

“I never see you this semester,” she said. “Are you taking any classes? You must be, you’re down here studying.”

“I had to take a full-time job to pay for school. Dad says I can live at home free as long as I’m in school but that’s the best he can do in the way of help, so I’ve got to pay my tuition. The money I saved ran out last semester and I had to go to work full time, so I take night classes.”

“That’s too bad. It must kill extracurricular activities. How many hours are you taking?”

“I have to take at least twelve hours a semester in order to not be drafted. In fact, I considered joining the army to get them to pay for school.”

“Oh, I’m so glad you didn’t do that! We know where you would have ended up.” Her concern and happiness that I was not right then in Vietnam surprised me, but I figured she must be this way with everyone. And I did enjoy the smile she shared with me as she said it.

“Me, too.” I paused, then continued. “You mentioned a sorority. Which one are you in?” I knew but I wanted to keep the conversation going.

“DZ.” I started to open my mouth but she must have seen the look of mischief on my face because before I could speak she laughed and said, “I know, I know! Easy DZ!”

I laughed but was not surprised that she had heard the expression used on campus to describe her sorority sisters. I was, however, surprised at the good humor with which she repeated it. Having no personal knowledge on the subject of the easiness of the sisters of Delta Zeta, I had always hoped it was true and that I would have a chance to find out. Now was my chance.

"So is it true? Are the DZs easy?"

"Not so much. You know how it is when some frat boy gets turned down. He wants to run her down. I suspect that's where it came from."

"Damn fraternities!"

She laughed at my mock scorn.

"Actually, we pride ourselves on our scholarship. We have 77% of our members on the Dean's List right now! That's highest of all the sororities on campus!"

I loved talking to this woman! Every comment was punctuated with enthusiasm and a smile.

I decided to make some points. "You may emphasize scholarship, but I think as a group your sorority is the best looking on campus."

It worked. There was that smile, again.

"Well, thank you. We don't think so, though. Have you seen the Chi Os? They're really, what is it you guys say? Stacked!"

"Yeah, but that's not everything."

"My sisters tease me because I'm not very well endowed." She turned slightly as if to show me her lack of assets.

"You know what they say. 'More than a mouthful's a waste.'"

She blushed and smiled, then laughed. After an almost imperceptible pause during which she clearly mulled the proper response, she blurted, “I always heard that as ‘more than a handful!’” More blushing and smiling. Good Lord, she was beautiful.

“Either way, I think you are fine.” And she was. She was certainly attractive. Now that I was talking to her I realized that her personality made her beautiful. Her figure got my attention so I didn’t worry about the smallness of her breasts. Besides, I’m a butt man.

What I really enjoyed, though, was the conversation. The more we talked, the more I was attracted to her. We talked about family. She had a younger sister and her father was an Attorney. Her mother stayed home. She was from in town but lived on campus because her parents wanted her to enjoy the college experience. An English major, she wanted to teach grade school, and had a dog and a cat at home. The dog was old, the cat fat. She loved the friendships she found in the sorority, and hoped someday to serve on the alumni board because she admired the women who did so much. The woman she admired the most, though, was her mother, because she was always so organized and friendly! (her exclamation point, not mine). Her father warned her about boys like me (WHAT?!). She teased me as if she were my sister, and I teased back. I found out where she went to high school, and try as we might we could not find one common friend between us. The only thing we had in common was that for forty-five minutes on an unknown date that will live forever in my memory we talked as if we had known each other for years. More importantly, we talked as if we would know each other for years.

Finally, she began shifting from one foot to the other. Several times I had said I better let her get back to her studying, and each time she gave me that smile and said she was okay. Now, however, I could tell she was becoming uncomfortable, and when I suggested we needed to end our conversation she agreed.

“Maybe I’ll see you again!” She said, smiling. She turned and disappeared into the restroom.

I returned to the Smokers’ Lounge and sat in my chair, but I didn’t study. I only had about fifteen minutes before my class started and I wanted to use that time to think. I had a lot to think about.

First, there was the matter of her name. I didn't know it. Never had. Should I go back out and ask her name? After the conversation we had she might think I should already know it, but I doubt she knew mine, either.

Then, there was the matter of my steady girlfriend. I had had a similar all-encompassing conversation with her when we first met. We had recently talked of marriage. Was this my last fling before marriage? Most last flings involve a lot more than just conversation, but then I was never Mr. Suave. Conversation might be the most I could muster.

I thought about her status on campus. While she was not "Big Woman on Campus," she was certainly popular. I had seen her in so many activities. Our school definitely had its striations of social classes, and we were not in the same league. I didn't think I would fit in with her friends and family. I was comfortable on the outside looking in. I was certainly in love with my girlfriend, who had gone to work in a department store right out of high school, and would probably work there the rest of her life. No, any relationship with the unknown Madame X was doomed to failure.

So I didn't go back to get her name and phone number, or to ask her to join me for a cup of coffee after my class. I picked up my books and went to class. I finished the semester, got engaged the following Christmas, married the summer after, finished college, did some graduate work, had children and grandchildren, changed jobs a few times, got divorced, remarried, and retired. I had health problems and vacations. Good times and bad times. Laughter and tears. I grew in knowledge and got fat and bald.

And I never learned her name.