

*You can find Anna's 2<sup>nd</sup> post on page 4 below.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Post:**

I'm sorry if my story is too long – I kind of got carried away.

My priest was ordained 11 years ago – so he is matured in age but not old. We started off as friends, just exchanging emails. All my life I have been very ignorant about how priests live and feel as human beings. I have always sincerely thought that they are all genuinely celibate and they never fall in love. So I never imagined that he was busy falling in love with me, until he told me. When he told me, in my mind I just thought he was just sexually frustrated and just wanted a release after which he would dump me. I asked him what he wanted from me because he is a priest. I asked him straight out: “Do you just want to scratch an itch and then forget about me? What can you possibly want from me other than sex? Are you even allowed to date?” He admitted that he is not allowed to date and that in his mind he knows that it will be wrong but in his heart it feels right and I make him happy.

And to answer my question about what he wants from me he said: “I just want a bit of love and a bit of understanding. I want you to understand that due to my age and limited experience I am not going to make a perfect husband”. He said he is not looking to scratch an itch because after the itch is scratched there will still be a need for more. He was hurt that I thought he just wanted sex. He said he loved and respected me.

I admitted to him that I loved him too but there is a conflict in my mind because of the priesthood. I live with this conflict even to this day. He says he is conflicted too. I have tried to end the relationship twice. Both times he was tremendously hurt and kept asking me what he had done wrong. It's hard to break up with someone who has done nothing wrong – where you don't have something specific to blame, other than “because you are a priest”. When we broke up, we remained friendly, we did not stop communicating and both times things just automatically gravitated back to a romantic relationship.

We have been intimate twice, but I can't anymore – I feel too guilty about having sex outside marriage and with a priest. He understands and accepts my decision. But it doesn't look like he has any regrets about the intimacy; I am the only one that feels guilty about it. It bothers me that he doesn't feel guilt about breaking his celibacy vow with me. It makes me wonder if he is not a player who sleeps around and is by now used to breaking the vow. Does he really understand and accept my decision to be celibate because he loves me or because he can get it elsewhere whenever he wants? I asked him if he is seeing other women, he denied it (no one would admit such a thing anyway). I hate to be so distrustful of such a nice man, but it's a huge challenge for me to understand intimacy with someone who has taken a vow before God to be pure and chaste. He says his feelings for me are far beyond sex, so he loves me even though I will not have sex with him. However, he did say that he has a problem with this because he asks himself, if I am not doing it with him, who

am I doing it with? But he realises that he can't ask me such questions when he has not given me a commitment (a ring). He says for now it's enough to know that we are in love and he loves me without sex. I asked him how difficult it is to be with me in the same room and be celibate. He says it's hard if we are kissing and hugging because naturally after that one feels the need to go further, but he can control himself. I must be honest; I don't know how long either of us can be strong in this. We are not animals, we can control our urges – but we are human, we do have these urges and they do get stronger as time goes by.

Do I think he will leave the priesthood to be with me - NO. When he said that he needs me to understand that he will not be a perfect husband because of his age and experience; that made me wonder if he was considering being my husband but I never I asked, I just wondered internally. I have never asked him to leave and I don't think I should; I believe it should be his decision entirely. The fact that he did not think that his priesthood stood in the way of being a perfect husband – but rather that he thought the issues were only his age and experience kind of makes me think that maybe he could leave the priesthood. But I doubt it. I have asked him why he allows himself to be in relationships because when he chose this life he knew what it entails. He knew what he would have to do without. He said he made this choice a very long time ago. He was very young when he made the choice. He said when you make the choice you are all hyped up about serving God and you think you will be happy without love. But after living there alone all these years and as he grows up into a man, he can't. He says maybe he is weak. Now, if he sees it as a weakness, just a phase of succumbing to temptation, that makes me think he will never leave. He will fight and pray for strength and then he will stay. I feel like I am nothing but a temptation to him.

Now about us not having sex – we do kiss and hug and we both struggle with not going all the way. One day I asked him if our relationship can survive without sex. He said it can't survive because we are young – if we were maybe 50 years old, maybe we would survive a celibate relationship. I don't know what to make of that. He later took it back, but it lingers at the back of my mind. Truth be told, I also wonder how long I can hold on to a relationship that has no future. Because if he does not leave the priesthood, then we don't really have a future. Sometimes I even wonder if I can call what we are doing a relationship at all. I wonder if I should be dating other people and find someone who is able to commit to me in a more meaningful way. But I can't because the priest has my heart. I love him and I am not the kind of a person who is capable of loving 2 people at once. He told me that he dated a woman once, but they were never intimate, only phone calls and emails. But the woman left him when she met someone who wanted to marry her. He never gave up the priesthood for that woman, he let her go – he won't give it up for me either.

The secrecy is the hardest part for me. I live alone at my house, so he visits me there. We do go out to the movies and do eat out at restaurants. But when we are out we can't hold hands or stay at a restaurant too long – in case someone who knows him sees us. I can't visit him at his house because of the secret that must be kept hidden. It is possible to visit him if

we plan in advance, so that he can organise for the other priest he works with to be scarce. But still, this walking in the shadows frustrates me a lot. Not being able to introduce him to my friends as my boyfriend hurts. My friends don't even know that I am in a relationship with anyone – to everyone I am a lonely spinster. I am actually ashamed to be in love with a priest. I feel like I am being trashy because that's how people look at women who date priests. In people's eyes we are the dirty evil ones that are seducing holy servants of God.

Knowing that I will never meet his family and friends as his girlfriend (or wife) is so painful. On his birthday this year I visited him at his house for the first time, just to spend his special day with him. He did suggest that we go to a hotel but I refused. I will not sneak in and out of hotels to hide love. Love is supposed to be a beautiful thing. I will not deliberately expose his secret but I refuse to stoop so low as to go and hide in motel rooms as if I am having an affair with a married man, which I would never do – and I told him this. I am not doing anything wrong; I am just loving a man. (But OK, that's a wrong justification to do wrong – that's what women who date married men say as well, that they are not the ones who took the marriage vows. I suppose it takes 2 to tango, so it's my problem too). Anyway, so we went to his house. I was surprised though that he wanted us to go out. I thought he would hide me in the house and order in. But we went out and he introduced me to people. He didn't say we were in a relationship, but he walked up to them and said "Meet so-and-so". He even introduced me to his grown nephew and we spent the whole day with him. Although he did not tell the boy about the relationship, anyone with half a brain would know. I don't know what all this means. I am not holding my breath that he will leave the priesthood, but he is becoming more open about me day by day. He has also told his best friend, who is also a priest, that we are exchanging emails and he was very excited and relieved that he has finally told him. That's all he told him, that we are exchanging emails, but it's a step. Recently I asked him to explain his love for me and where it can possibly go. He said he loves me more than he can explain in words. He said he does not have all the answers but in order to show me how much he loves me he will have to change his life completely and I have to give him time to think about that. This statement does not commit him to changing his life, but it is yet another step (unless I am reading too much into it, just hearing what I want to hear).

I am still conflicted about the wrongness of the whole thing. Even loving him without having sex still feels wrong sometimes. I asked him if our love without sex was a sin and he assured me that it's not, but I don't know. I have considered going to the confessional with this to get advice from a different priest, but I think I know what advice I will get: "Stop the relationship", and I am not quite ready to stop it now, I love him very strongly and he returns my love very evidently. I did say to him playfully that he must marry me if he wants to make love to me and he said I must ask his mom...we laughed.

Can I ask your personal opinion please? Listening to my story, do you think this is a kind of a person who can commit to marriage or am I setting myself up for heartache? We know that

in general, women who love married men with the hope that they will leave their wives are kidding themselves, men don't leave their wives to be with a mistress (generally). Isn't it the same with the priest who is for all intents and purposes married to the church? Do priests actually WANT to be married?

At the moment priests live quiet literally a very comfortable life. The church pays for all their needs. They go on holidays overseas every year, they have cable TV paid for by the church, they don't have mortgage bonds, they have cars and gas paid for by the church, the list goes on - an ordinary working man cannot afford all these things. If the Vatican held a referendum today and asked priests if they want to be married, would they vote "Yes"? If they are married they have to start feeding their wives and children. They must pay school fees, buy clothes, etc. Can the church afford to feed a full family as opposed to one single man? If the church will not feed their families for them, are they prepared to do without the good life they are living now in order to raise a family?

As for celibacy as a rule – is it really affecting them (the priests) at all? They have us loving them and helping them keep it a secret. They are having their cake and eating it too. We, women who love priests, aren't we actually perpetuating the problem? Aren't we handing them a silver platter with bread in it and saying: "Here Father, have your bread, I have buttered it on both sides for you."? They get to have us in secret by night and keep their religion by day. We can speak out all we want – but if the priests are happy with the current state of affairs, we are wasting our breath.

Also – isn't celibacy a perfect platform to "cheat"? A priest can easily have 10 women and each one guarding his secret for him, thinking she is hiding the love affair from the church while in fact she is also hiding it from other women. This is not to say that priests are indeed this evil, it is just good to think about these things as a woman when you put yourself in the situation of loving a priest. We must keep in mind that they are human, not saints, and humans are fallible.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Post several weeks after above post:**

I have finally made the decision to walk away from my relationship with a priest. And it hurts like hell. 7 weeks ago I wrote him a letter explaining my issues concerning his celibacy vows, the sinfulness of what we are doing and the painfulness of the secret relationship. He did not reply – not even a single word. He did not even acknowledge my pain. I reminded him several times but he still did not reply. Instead he just continued with the relationship as if I never said anything. He just continued to tell me that he loves me. So I realised that he is playing games with me. He wants to have his cake and eat it too and I am letting him get away with it. So I reminded him one last time about the letter. When he failed to respond once again, I stopped taking his calls and I don't reply to his text messages. I have deleted all his contact details to make sure I don't get tempted to contact him. He has not once asked

me why I have stopped talking to him. I suppose that's because he knows why. I don't think I am being unfair or hurtful to him. I think I have given him enough chances to do things right but it's clear he is just playing games and I don't do that. I don't play games – I made this very clear to him from day 1. I told him that I don't play with love and if he wanted to have "fun" he should look elsewhere. He assured me that he was not playing but what do they say about actions speaking louder than words? There are a lot of women out there who just want to have fun – it's unfair for people (priest or not) to play games with your heart when you have made it clear that you are not that kind of a person. There are people out there who are open and willing to play. I don't condemn people who play, it just doesn't work for me personally and I am always very clear and vocal about that from the start. But no need to cry over spilled milk. I am just trying my best to pick myself up and move on. Hopefully time will heal the pain.

We know that not all priests are heartless game players because we see that some are getting married – so we get into these relationships hoping that we are not being played. But as time goes by it is possible to tell whether or not you are being played. At this point it's up to you to stay and continue to be played or save yourself the pain and embarrassment – it is embarrassing to be played if you know and you allow it. This is not something specific for priests; any man who is playing games is not worthy of your time. Not all of them are players, but the ones who are not players would never expect you to live in secret and darkness – they would show their intention to live an honest married life from the word go. We must not fool ourselves into thinking that we can make them love us so much that loving us will make them want to leave the priesthood. It doesn't matter how much you love a person, you cannot MAKE them love you back. It's very hard and very painful to end a relationship, but you don't need it if it hurts you. My heart is breaking right now and I feel like giving up on love altogether – but I'm better off alone than being used.