

SYLVIA MONOLOGUE, 1
From *Taking Up Serpents*
By Mark Chrisler
Copyright 2011

SYLVIA

I'd call myself a believer. Which is that I'm not a regular church-goer or that, but I believe. For me, at the least, believing can make it tough. 'Cause like, if there's just no grace in this world, then that's that. But when you believe there is, it's hard not to spend some of your time, some of your thoughts, some of your heart wondering "where's mine?" Now, that's the sort of thing I ought not admit to. You're supposed to be content with whatever you get. Whatever grace you're afforded. Even if it's just a toe. All my life people have been saying "Sylvia's so brave," "Sylvia's so comfortable," Sylvia's so at peace with herself."

But I'm not. I'm nothing special. If I get through a day it's turned into a sermon. If I make a pot of coffee for myself, people make it out into some sort of noble parable. When the truth of the matter is, I'm just a regular girl. You put anyone in my position, they'd do it too. No special courage, no wisdom; none of it.

What happened is, when I was twelve, there was a car accident. We were coming home from a wedding--my dad and my mom and I--and he'd probably been drinking a little too much. They say--the police and whoever--that he died instantly. And mom, she never talked again. I remember, it felt like hours waiting for someone to come, in that overturned pickup.

They say he died instantly, but it's a lie. A lot of that time, waiting, for a good while, I could hear my dad. I could hear him crying. And saying,

over and over, like a prayer: oh no. “Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no.” Like that. Little and breathy. Like it was forever. I just wanted him to stop. I said it. My throat was dry and I coughed it out: “please stop.” And then, he did.

They had to cut through the car to get my mom out. But that wasn't enough to free me. He was in the way. So. They cut.

After that, she never talked. And I never walked.

But we lived on. And for that, I was idolized. For that. People would put a hand on my shoulder. They were awed. At my courage. When I'd asked him to stop.