



Super Woman

By Jewel Beth Davis

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The red light on the answering machine flashes on and off in an alarming manner. *Listen. To me. Answer. Me. Don't. Walk by. You'd better. Listen.*

It's New Year's Eve, 1:30 PM. I've just arrived home. My lids are drooping and small kernels of unknown disturbances in my eyes seem to have magnified into glass shards. I walk through my office on my way to bed and glance at my answering machine. It's blinking with four messages.

Four! I never get four messages. The machine is like a loud, insistent relative that I'm obligated to interact with but would rather not. If blinking had a decibel level, this would be a nine or ten. This is intriguing. It had better not be bad news. But why would anyone call on New Year's unless something terrible happened?

I think about leaving it blinking until the morning. I mean, whoever is dead or hurt will still be similarly situated in the morning. I can't do it. I don't have the self-discipline. I reach my hand, the finger pointing like the Ghost of Christmas Future, toward the message button hoping they're all wrong numbers. I depress the button.

"Professor Jewel? You know who this is? It's Turk."

Good Lord. Turk? Sam Turcinski, better known as Turk, is one of my college students at _____ College. He's a rugged blonde boy who makes me laugh. He has taken two Communication classes with me and has signed up to take a third. He'd earned Ds in his first class until halfway through the semester. Then I told him it wasn't good enough; he'd have to do better. His final grade was a B.

"Professor Jewel. I need help. You're the only one I could turn to."

My eyes are glued to the machine.

Me? Oh God, is he hurt? Is he in jail? I live an hour away, too far to get there quickly.

I am immobile. Listening.

"You see," Turk continues, "I'm at a New Year's party at my best friend's house."

"So?" I say to the machine.

"Anyhoo, I won't say I haven't been drinking. I have. I mean, it's New Year's for Chrissakes, Jewel."

"Get to the point." "I say aloud to the inanimate object.

"Well, my best friend's mother is here at the party."

Oh good Lord.

“Jewel, this mom is a hottie. She’s a MILF and she said she wants to do it with me tonight. You know, do IT.” He emphasizes the words as if I might not understand. “I really want to, but I don’t know if it’s the right thing.”

For those not familiar with the vernacular, MILF is an acronym for Mothers I’d Like to F__k. I didn’t create it and I wouldn’t admit it if I had.

“So what do you think Jewel? Should I do it with her? I trust your judgment. You always know the right thing to do.”

Turk doesn’t know me if he can say that. Often, I don’t know the right thing to do. And besides, is there always one right thing to do? I don’t think so.

“Call me back, Professor,” Turk says. “Please. I’m dying to go to bed with her but I’ll wait for your phone call.” Click.

He’ll wait for my phone call? Picture that.

Since when have I become God or the arbitrator of right and wrong? I teach Communication, not Ethics. I’m Jewish. We don’t have a right or wrong that’s black and white. We argue about everything.

The answering machine gives a high-pitched bleep and Turk’s voice comes back on. “Jewel, where are you? You haven’t called back yet. Should I sleep with my best friend’s mother, or not? I really, really want to but what would happen if I did? Would my friend be mad at me? Come on, the clock’s ticking and I need an answer.”

I am *not* calling him back. Is he cuckoo? It’s 1:30 AM and clearly my teacherly obligations do not extend to early morning phone calls about morality.

“You know what?” I say to the machine. “I think you already know the right thing to do because otherwise, you wouldn’t be questioning yourself to the point of calling your professor. In the middle of the night. On a holiday.”

At this moment, I’m struck by how much power teachers have with their students. I feel to my depths how much it means that he has elected to call me at this moment.

The third message is my brother Mike. The fourth is more of the same from Turk. Now, the machine stops blinking red and shouting. No one has died and for that I’m grateful. I move up the stairs to put my fears and myself to bed.

As I climb up to my attic bedroom, I realize that I shouldn’t like it when my students call me about personal issues. They should only seek me out to ask academic advice. During the day. Okay, Turk is over the top tonight. But still...

Three weeks later, I return to work. Turk is in my Interpersonal Communication class where I teach students to listen and talk more

effectively in their various relationships.

“Turk, I couldn’t call you back. It’s not appropriate for me to tell you what to do in situations like that.”

“I know that,” he says. “I had a bit to drink. And this woman was really tempting.”

I can feel the thought skittering around in my mind like a confused bat crashing into walls. *What had he decided to do?*

“But,” Turk continues, “I thought about what *you’d* do in a circumstance like that, Jewel. I want you to know, I did the right thing.”

I decide I don’t want to know what that is.

I never thought teaching would allow me to feel so powerful. When Turk says this, my mind flashes to an image of when I was a girl. I used to dream every night that I was Superwoman soaring in the sky. I yearned to fly. This is pretty close.

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