

Praying for Psolitude

Every morning, I take my dog Sophie to one of Mt. Washington's soccer field so she can fetch lacrosse balls. This ritual makes me happy, but only if I don't have to talk to anyone. I try to guarantee my solitude by arriving when most people are commuting to work, but the strategy isn't foolproof.

A few months ago, a woman showed up at the field, her dog in tow. Immediately, the dog invaded Sophie's personal space, barking maniacally. His proud mother boasted, "My dog is a Corgi and he loves to herd!"

"That's great," I replied, "but my Lab loves chasing balls without a dog nipping at her heels. Perhaps your little Corgi could herd elsewhere."

I rarely regret being harsh, but I thought I sensed a twinge of guilt. So I feigned friendliness and asked the woman what her dog's name was. She told me it was Samuel.

"Hmm. Samuel. That's an interesting name for a dog," I said, thinking, *Who on earth names their dog Samuel?*

"It's not Samuel, she replied, "it's Psalmuel, like a psalm you'd sing in church." *Oh dear god. Show me the green pastures so I can lay down and die.*

Other words from Psalm 23 flooded my mind, causing confusion of biblical proportions. If I'm not supposed to want, for example, why did I ache with the

desire to strangle this woman? Where, exactly, were the restorative still waters?
And why did a stroll through the valley of death suddenly seem so appealing?

*Clearly, I thought, goodness and mercy weren't going to follow me
anywhere.*

Oblivious to my moral dilemmas, Psalmuel's mother started chatting
again. "Did you say your dog was a Labrador retriever? Because I really don't
think so. I'm pretty sure you have a Chesapeake Bay retriever."

At times like these I fear no evil except mine own.

"Well, according to her papers and her veterinarian, she's a Lab. But
you're probably right. I'm going to double check her lineage as soon as I get
home." *Immediately after I tattoo every inch of my body.*

Perhaps Psalmuel was the channel—I'll never know—but suddenly, a
sense of stillness pervaded my being. Many people get this feeling from praying.
I get it from being alone.

Calmly, without benefit of rod or staff, I turned away from the onerous dog
owner and guided myself in a straight path home to solitude. When I arrived
there, free of Corgi and Pest, my cup ranneth over with joy.