

God: "Well, yeah, sorta. Or you've got to go for *at least* a year."

Me: "You've gotta be kidding me. I was sort of amazed that I made it this long."

God: "But look how good you feel about yourself. And if you do this, it nullifies everything you've done so far. You stop, you go back to zero."

Me: "That's not fair. I have to get *some* credit for trying so hard."

God: "What credit should you get? This is something you shouldn't have been doing in the first place."

Me: "And so You're telling me that nobody else in the world does it? That I'm the only one?"

God: "Whoever does it isn't a good person. If you want to be a bad person, then go ahead and be my guest. Just remember that if you're not concerned about losing days off the end of your life, what if you're not *supposed* to live to be ninety-three years old? What if I decided when I made you that you were only going to live until you were twenty? If that's the case, if you head into that bathroom and do what you're thinking about doing, how do you know that you haven't used up all the remaining days you had in reserve? This could be the one that makes you drop dead."

Me: "... is that true?"

God: "Maybe. Hey, it's not my job to let you know that stuff. You should have been keeping track. What, I'm not busy enough running the world, now I have to keep count of how many days you're masturbating off your life?"

Me: "I don't know. You sure seem to have enough time to sit in my head and give me a hard time about it constantly. Don't You have a famine to solve or something?"

God: "Fine, do whatever you want. But just think how terrible you're going to feel about yourself afterwards."

I sat there and stared at the unattractive picture of the very unattractive hairy nude woman. I looked over at the bathroom door and shined my penlight at it. I stared, I tried to talk myself out of it, and then I sighed and got out of bed.

God: "Where are you going?"

Me: "I just have to go to the bathroom, that's all."

God: "Then why are you taking the magazine with you?"

Me: "Because I want something to read in there. Gimme a break, would Ya? My stomach's all goofed up. I might have to sit there a while."

God: "You'd better not masturbate."

Me: "I won't."

I lied.

The minute I was finished, I was filled with absolute disgust at myself, at my weakness, and at the picture of the hairy naked woman. I had let myself down and I had thrown away my gargantuan effort of the past thirty-eight days. I felt terrible, worse than if I had actually dropped dead. And I knew that there was nothing God could do to punish me that would be worse than how much I was already punishing myself.

And right at that moment, my father knocked on the door.

"What are you doing in there?" he said impatiently. "I've gotta go to the bathroom."

In my panic at the unexpected moment, I pulled my pajamas back up and threw open the door . . . and promptly forgot that the magazine was sitting on the floor next to the toilet. My father pushed past me and shut the door. My heart was beating out of my chest. He was going to see the picture. Maybe he'd just think I was reading a funny magazine and innocently happened to have dropped it open to that particular