

Vs. God

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Vs. God

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Hemmingway "All thinking men are atheists."

-Ernest

My back was arched upon this hard plastic chair. My eyes were closed, but looking up. The bright light of heaven was no more than the buzzing harshness of florescent lights, persistently pounding my face like a lousy sun. It was as loud as anyone would imagine Hell. The screaming cries from wives now widowed. From the wails of men and the clamoring of Jesus freaks still pumping out the useless religious rhetoric. REPENT! REPENT! The noise never softened. I heard howling that sounded like the flaming inferno, rising up to cook us. As I gauged the room temperature, the worry that I had been damned to Hell for eternity was gone in the cool air. In fact, I opened up my eyes to check for sure.

I observed a room not unlike a DMV or an emergency room lobby. There was blood and shit everywhere. My eyes locked on a woman directly across from me. She was Mexican and blurting out constantly in Spanish. Make up was dripping down her face. She was in a hospital gown of sort and what seemed like blood had blasted out of her pussy and dried up on the lower region of the gown. She fell to the floor and curled up in the fetal position, still hollering bullshit in her native tongue. Across from her, my eyes moved to two young men. 17 years old? 18? One had his arm around the other with his head buried in the sharp point of his shoulder. His buddy had been in better shape I figured. His head was disconnected from the bone, and flopping amongst his shoulders like a loose glove on a swivel. Was it an auto accident? Driving too fast while fucked up on those Xanax and Jagerbombs? Blood was dripping from his friend's nose—of course, there was blood everywhere.

I bowed my head forward, still sitting stiffly in the chair. I brought my hand up to my temple to discover my own wound. Dried blood scabbed off of the whole left side of my face. I shook my head hard. There was no feeling at all. No pain. No dizziness. There was nothing but the sensation of feeling. The scabs of blood that I scratched off flaked down to the floor. It was mixed with all of the other mortal fluids and pieces of skin off of the bodies that had come here before.

A man had walked over near my section, spitting scripture from the Bible. "THIS IS GODS TEST, WE MUST ALL REPENT! THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE; OUR SAVING GRACE!" I looked up at him, annoyed. I wanted to slap him in the god damned face and tell him to shut the fuck up—the Spanish broad too, but that all seemed redundant now; the goal to kill has been taken from us along with the fear of dying.

Though my section had been rather calm, there were other sections where the dead had acted like monkeys. One man in khaki-colored slacks and an Oakland Raider's shirt, Oakland Odie, was jumping off of chairs in a full leap of faith. He said that he should be able to fly, but every time he tried he would fall flat on his egg-shaped head, which made me think that this one had died due to complications of Down syndrome. Sometimes I could hear the smack of his skull hitting the ground through the entire racket. Another man behind me, a much older gentleman, would walk around

grabbing women's breast. With no more fear of the legal ramifications, he had decided to live out his dream of being an absolute pervert. This caused quite the stir and had many men beating the old man senselessly until they were tired out. Mostly the men would walk away and the old man would be back at it twenty minutes later.

There were no clocks. As well as the certainty that time did not hinder us any longer. It was constant chaos with no end in sight. There were no windows and the air was dense. I attempted to stand up and walk around. My legs were a little stiff. I let out a little 'ugh' as I stood. I lifted my arms as much as I could and stretched. It was nut-to-butt in there. Not a seat in the house and a lot of people elected to stand up, walk around and move about, it felt like the best idea. After twisting my body from side to side, observing all of the wrath and senseless carnage around me, I decided to sit back down and stay where I was. Just in case old man grabby decides to get bored with women and move on to men.

I was comfortable, at least, with what I was wearing. I had planned it perfectly to wear my favorite clothes, just in case the good lord would bless me with the opportunity to keep my favorite knits and not try to shroud me with some roman times toga or even prison garb with numbers on the back. JCC (JESUS CHRIST CORRECTIONAL FACILITY INMATE #13447685). I had chosen my black slacks, with boxer briefs-- no nut huggers. My best button up made of 60 percent cotton and 40 percent polyester. It was burgundy, like my wine. And flip flops I bought from the drug store not even a week before I had decided to end my shit life.

POP! The flying retarded man had smacked his face on the tile, this time with enough gusto to stop his section of the moaning. The groans of despair briefly turned to ooo's and ahhh's.

I managed a grin through the sobbing of the teenage mutant neck-less turtles next to me and Dora the stillborn explorer still wailing in Mexican. I managed a grin, not a smile, but something I hadn't felt in awhile. It was something I hadn't expected to achieve in a crooked, fucked up hellhole like this. I felt institutionalized; A bad man who makes his home at state prisons. Even cracking a grin in this environment gave me goose bumps. And how a man—any man, could find a way to smile--this was prison. We were being punished and I was sure that this was Hell. I would be in this room, with Dora and Grandpa bad touch to no end. I'd have company with Bill-o-pastor, constantly reading scripture from a book that we'd all but forget. I'd be in here forever, staring at brick walls and florescent tubes, sharing space with mad men and heathens. I'd be sure of it, if it weren't for the number system.

"Now serving B127, in door number 13."

I looked down at my ticket "T468."

I grunted "Fuck." It was loud enough to gain the attention of a young man sitting across from me to my left hand corner. We locked eyes. His looked disheveled. He was shaking and there were track marks up his arms.

"Why won't they give me some? I need it, man. Why isn't there any smack here, man? It doesn't matter anymore."

I shook my head and countered away.

"It doesn't matter anymore, man. Nothing matters." He resumed.

I was in no mood. Certainly, this wasn't it. We'd all be moved eventually, but where? Have we even been judged? I cringed a bit like my Latina friend, Dora, for the fact that I may be sent to a hell or

something worse than this. My head dropped and I felt defeated. There was no god here. There was no one to talk to

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My name is Keith Bannester and I am dead. On the evening hours of December 24th I decided to put a gun to my head and pull the trigger. It was a 40 caliber revolver. You could say that I was depressed, but I would say moreover, I was getting bored. I was tired of failing. They (whoever they might actually be) have always told me to follow my dreams, and if I worked hard enough and wanted it bad enough, they will come true. What a crock of shit. I had trouble holding down any jobs. I was a journalist, or so I said. My only jobs consisted of interviewing the local townspeople of Podunk, OK on the next noodling festival. Or the kids on their crooked fund raisers. I didn't fail, I bowed down to defeat by simply getting bored because in the end, who really gives a fuck about little Timmy selling Mr. Goodbars, or which asshole can pull the most fish out of a hole in the ground with their finger?

Podunk was centrally located on what was cleverly called The Bible Belt (56 inch waist). People from here thought they knew a lot about God and knew Jesus was their lord and savior. However, if it ever came down to it, not a single one of these inbreeds could pour piss out of a boot with the directions printed on the heel. As far as the Carolinas all the way west to Texas, one million people, who could hardly read the directions on the back of a Pop Tart box, say that they read The Bible and came to the conclusion that they all had a personal relationship with someone who may have died 2,000 years prior—if he even lived at all. Equipped with this insight, I decided to leave the spellbinder world of the annual noodle fest and go to work for myself.

I have to give most of the credit to Jimmy Clawson. He was an old buddy of mine from the high school days. Jimmy wasn't too bright, nor would he ever have to worry about causing any girls to suffer an early teen pregnancy. Jimmy was fat and as dumb as a log. After Jimmy and I graduated from high school (which was a testament in itself to the proof of an actual god and a witness to a miracle), we took up a job with his father, transporting large logs across the state line. Jimmy's father was dumb too, but he had the will enough to muster a brain cell or few to keep the job afloat. Jimmy and I were hired on for the grunt work. After the logs and debris were collected, Jimmy and I would strap them in the back of the 20 foot flat bed using come-alongs. One morning, on our first load, Jimmy was tightening the rope. I had gone for a smoke. It was the first and the last time I would leave Jimmy alone to do any job by his self. That morning, he wrenched the come-along tighter and tighter until it finally snapped back and caved Jimmy's face in.

I noticed it was crushed badly once I visited him at the hospital. However, it had been a good look for Jimmy if nothing else. He was dumb and now he had the face to match. I felt bad, but not guilty. His father took it well, through the constant flow of alcohol instead of blood in his veins. His mother, June, had taken the incident quite the opposite; she was devastated. And that is what had me feeling bad. June was always a sweet lady to me. She always kissed me on the forehead and offered me dinner and treats almost every night. Sometimes I noticed that June would just burst out into tears at anytime. Whether it be the good times or the bad. Sitting at the table for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, it didn't matter; she would almost always break out in tears. As kids,

we had no idea why.

After the Jimmy- facial, his father became more belligerent and more abusive. June had always been one to pray and one day her prayers were actually answered. On that fateful evening, Jesus came down from the heavens to visit the Clawson's home. Like Santa, he slid down through the chimney and snuck into the residence, into the master bedroom and without a peep, managed to grab a pillow and put it over Harold's drunken, blacked out face, blocking his airways. It took only three minutes for Jesus to capture Harold's lousy soul and send it express to Hell where he'd be beaten by a thousand drunken idiots, calling him a whore and cramming flaccid whiskey dicks in his face for all eternity. And not a drop will ever be spared.

The cops in town, being devout Christians themselves, bought the story, or perhaps let it go. Harold was known around town as a drunken loser, and amongst the drunken losers that all congregated around Podunk, I'd say that was his crowning achievement. He had managed to be the ugliest mother fucker in a town of ugly mother fuckers, and jealousy ran through the town once word got out that, because he was the ugliest mother fucker in the town of ugly mother fuckers, he got to meet Jesus. Most were glad Harold was gone. I even thought about doing a story on the miracle, but I regret to say that it was the exact day as the annual Podunk pancake eating contest and I had my obligations.

Jimmy and his mother would have many of tough years ahead, however. Jimmy was prescribed a substantial amount of Oxycodone for his sloped in face. Miserable and hopeless, he learned quickly of its wonderful effects of numbing and dumbing-down the horrid things in life. The Oxy consumed his being. Jimmy became dumber than ever. June would now have to deal with her stoned, pug-faced son rather than taking an emotional and physical beating from Harold. She would've taken the latter. Because, for June, Seeing her son go through addiction as he wobbled around the house slurring bullshit about the little demons ripping his blankets off of his bed, tore her to pieces and broke June's poor little heart way too much.

On the afternoon of July 31st, 2001, June lost her fight with breast cancer. She never took chemo nor accepted any other forms of treatment. Jimmy was too out of his pea brain to worry and took more pills to deal with the stress. I, on the other hand, being the journalist at heart, asked her why.

She said "Keith, I have God. And that's all I need. Jesus already came to my rescue once (wink) and I couldn't possibly ask him for anything more. He gave me a wonderful son and gave him a good friend in you to look after him, and for that sweetie, I'm not afraid to die."

Jimmy had never been the religious type. He and I would rant on for countless hours on the fallacies of the great book together. We'd rant on about how it was impossible for one man to build a boat and gather all of the animals on the earth and survive a great flood. Jimmy had a comic book version of the Holy Bible that June got for him on his 7th birthday. We read that book and poked fun at it for years. Even breaking our weed over it and using some of the pages to roll joints with. We'd get high and listen to The Doors.

After his mother's passing, I decided to get a place with Jimmy. We got a 10 foot by 10 foot apartment cube in the supporting town of Winook, OK. My job had seen brighter days and with the economy going down the tubes, it was slim pickings for little Timmy's Mr. Goodbar sales and if that shit-head can't move product, I no longer had something to write about that the beautiful people of Podunk would like to read. So I took up an odd job as a cart pusher at Lou's grocery market. And Jimmy had been granted social security income due to his facial.

One night when I got home from work, I found Jimmy on his knees down the hall in front of his

bedroom door. Tears were streaming down his face and he was rocking back and forth, violently. I rolled my eyes and started toward him. He turns around suddenly and to my shock, grabbed me by my arms and shook me with little nudges.

“What the hell’s gotten into you, Jimmy?”

“You’re never going to believe this, Keith, but I had been visited by the Holy Ghost!”

I could feel my eyes turning around inside my head. This was it. This was all Jimmy had left. When I left for work that morning and said goodbye that was the last time I saw my old buddy. He turned around and slid back down on his knees, caressing his bedroom door.

“Don’t you see it, Keith?”

“See what?” I asked facetiously.

“Don’t you see mother?”

I had dropped my defense mechanism. I had lost all of my sarcasm and charming wit and began to sympathize with Jimmy. I started for him again, but stopped after what sounded like Jimmy’s little demons howling out of him.

“She’s spoken, Keith. She has found me and she wants me to know that everything’s okay.”

The water works continued. I halted for the next banshee cry; the next disembodied demon howl that came from him. He slid down the door by his hands, all the way to the floor. What Jimmy was looking at was a pattern in the wood. In that pattern he had made out a face that he claimed was June. I stared at the wood for the days and weeks following. I admit, I would always look at the door and see nothing but a wooden door which now, was to be a religious sacrament of a wooden door, with candles burning by it at all times and Jimmy constantly kneeling before it. He even encouraged some of the town’s people to come through and say a prayer in front of it. It was quite annoying for me to walk out in my underwear to use the restroom and have to walk over several lunatics just to take a shit comfortably. But, I let it continue, because Jimmy had been so moved by this door and by what he thought he had seen that he dropped the pill popping for good.

I never did see a face in the door but one night I remember him asking me if I had seen it yet. I put my arm around Jimmy, looked at the door and I said “yeah Jimmy, I do see it.” His face lightened up at me like a proud mother would her child. “She’s so beautiful.” And with that I pretended to see June in the door for Jimmy. I’d nod at her every time I passed. “Hey June.” And that pleased him very much and would also be the defining factor that would change my professional and personal life forever. I wanted to use my journalism for something good and against my better judgments, I decided to investigate. I was going to find God whether he liked it or not. And if he was there, I would find him and compliment him on his fine woods crafting.

The room was beginning to get to me. I was feeling restless, anxious and agitated. The stuffiness was getting to everyone, I believed. Frantic feelings whirled through the air. Grandpa bad touch was moving forth with his stained pants and his semi-hard pecker. Once in every blue moon, numbers would blurt out of the intercom.

"Now serving B239 in door number 7."

I felt the insanity of jail rushing over my body with the loneliness of solitary confinement. Who could I talk to? Bill won't stop preaching the gospel. Heroin McChester won't stop shaking and vomiting. Dora won't shut the fuck up. Any moment now I could see myself picking up where Grandpa left off and at least get myself a piece of ass in here.

"Now serving B240 in door number 16."

My jitters were matching that of the convulsive heroin addict. I looked down to check my number hopelessly, what felt like every 10 seconds. There would be no way that I would get through this. I felt like killing myself again. Grabbing the gun with less forgiveness this time, and blowing my brains out. I looked around even for something to jam into my ear hole. The insanity was deafening. This room was a compact sound box and with every screech, whine, or violent thumping, I was regretting my decision. We were completely closed in. No sun. No air circulation. We were just trapped in a cube like animals. We were always just animals and I could see it now; our primal nature was showing. It was becoming harder and harder, even for me, to keep my composure. My will to act civilized was crashing. The sense of it all was flying out of the nonexistent window and I could see myself ready to jump off chairs with Oakland Odie.

"Now serving B241 in door number 1."

I looked to my right and there were the doors Numbered 1 to 23. I caught a glimpse of an elderly woman, B241, walking through the first door. She was crying tears of great relief. Two nice young men draped an arm over each one of their shoulders and helped the lady through. Generally, mad men would seek out the next number and jump the person for it. They'd catch them before they hit the door, lay them out and drop their old number atop the unconscious man's body. But, with this woman, they showed a bit more civilized. "God bless. God bless." She said as she approached the doors and the two young men gently handed her off to someone beyond the door. What was beyond those doors? What was after this? My stomach felt tight and the tension was taking a slight physical effect however, no pain had been tolerated since I've landed myself here. More people began to maul each other and I thought Bill O'Pastor would be next. Uproar of religious debates became something I've noticed more frequently here and is what often turned violent. Most of the fighting didn't last long. It was more of way to vent for these people rather than an opportunity to inflict damage upon another person. I began to realize that no one would be harmed any more than what got them here in the first place. The fatal blow was the last of the physical punishment on the body, but nothing could stop the mental anguish. The paranoia and tirelessness was something that this life after life couldn't abolish and that, I thought, was even worse.

Another number wasn't called for awhile. And the steady flow of fussing and hollering continued. Hopelessness was drawing forth toward a total takeover of my new being. I wanted to flush it all away. If the alphabet was the same in this life, I wouldn't make it. Damned if I had a choice in the matter or not. I did not want to share this kind of company anymore than I'd have to. I got up from my hard plastic chair and started for one of the doors. Number 17. I thought I'd check it out. If nothing else, I could get a sense of what I'm in for when we finally get to 'T' and I could use this time to figure things out. Or perhaps, someone in there may have a book or a crossword puzzle.

I was closing in on 17 when a man grabbed me by the arm and spun me back around. I looked at him with scolding eyes. The man was short. About 5'6" and had slicked back, wavy black hair. He was a lawyer type. A Jew. Bob Weinstein, attorney at law. He looked at me without smiling and asked "are you Keith Bannester?"

"That depends on who's asking." I replied and ripped my arm from his wimpy grasp.

The smell of cheap cologne rubbed against my nose and I took a lean back. He wore a cheap suit with an even cheaper red tie. I wanted to bug him off, but the fact that he seemed very composed and knew my name comforted me. I have to admit, I was relieved.

"Let's have a seat back over here." He said.

I followed him back to my section, the minimum security seating, I affectionately called it. I was lucky to land in a spot that wasn't wreathed in bedlamite. Just the annoying Spanish and the smell of Heroin McChester's last supper. Bob offered my seat by waving his hand by it. I took his offer and slammed my ass back down on the hard plastic chair. He followed suit on one just as uncomfortable next to me. He had a briefcase that he lied on his lap and popped open to reveal a large amount of paperwork with different color tabs on the edges. He was mumbling my last name as he sifted through the pages. The smell of Jordache began to mix with the blood, the sweat and the vomit. I coughed with great effort and enthusiasm to take a miniscule break from it all.

"Here we are." He said, snatching a file folder out and arched it over his briefcase a little higher than he needed to and simultaneously shut his case and wedged it between his legs as to not let it touch the filthy linoleum.

"Whatcha got there?" I asked him.

"Your file, Mr. Bannester."

I scrunched my eyes closed as if it were bright in there. I kept them locked on the file folder as he opened it. I could hardly catch a single thing as he briskly flipped through the pages. "Who are you, may I ask?"

"-Suicide." He interrupted.

He crouched down and pressed his fingers to his temples and briefly massaged them. "What a day..."

He stayed down there for good time, sighing every couple seconds and exhaling strongly. He was coming off a bit fussy. I sat up in my chair with my arms resting on my lap. My eyes scanned the room to avert the awkwardness of it all. I got McChester's attention "it doesn't matter anymore, man." He said. Bob was still down, making moaning sounds that made a feeling of awkward silence surf my section, still surrounded by sonic booms of screaming and groaning. I sat there silently...

"Now serving B242 in door number 20."

Bob finally popped back up.

"Okay." He said brightly. "Okey dokey."

"Is there a problem?" I asked.

Bob laughed, but not with much enjoyment. He rolled his eyes around and shook his head once. "Well, not unless you want to stay in places like this any longer."

"Who are you?" I inquired.

With his eyes engaged on his paperwork, he reluctantly said "Your angel."

Bob was a far cry from an angel. With no wings and no halo, he also lacked the resources for affording a better suit; he was not to be trusted. I was no more comfortable than where I was a minute ago without meeting Bob. He screamed lawyer with every facet of his being. Yet, I felt as if what I've done to wind up here was a bit more than a misdemeanor, and this guy was at the very bottom of the grand pecking order. He was a cheap lawyer, who probably would've had cheesy commercials in his mortal life. One whose office would probably have been a small rental space crammed between a laundry mat and a doughnut shop. However, when I looked around, I didn't see much activity regarding anyone else conferencing with an angel in any suit. So that made the idea of having a Bob on my side comforting.

"Okay, Mr. Bannester, I want to ask you a few questions about your passing. This.... suicide." He stacked his papers and grabbed a pen out of his coat pocket. He scoffed and snapped his eyes at me, dropping his pen and papers down under his forearms "first of all, why did you do it?"

"I wanted to meet God." I said without skipping a beat.

My face remained stern and I kept my eyes on his. He retracted, and as if a gust of wind pushed him back to his original position, he began to scribble on his paper and with another

unenthusiastic grin he said “well, Mr. Bannester, I guess you weren’t much for praying or going to church in an attempt to reach out to God.”

“I wasn’t much for make believe.” I countered.

“Certainly there are other ways.”

“Are there?” I countered again. This time Bob dropped the argument. He wasn’t about to start with the meddling into religious affairs and for that I respected him. After all, McChester was right, none of it matters anymore. The jest is done. The guessing work was over. Let’s throw faith out of the god damned inexistent window, because this was it. This Looney bin. This solid bricked cage was where you went—or where you started. No loving god would ever run his shop this way and leave these people, faithful or not, trapped with one another with hundreds of dead, panicking strangers. Unless, this was Hell, and the only thing left to determine now was which circle they drop me off at. In which case, this all would have made perfect sense. But to my surprise, Bob continued with the rubbish...

“You’re a Christian or...”

I let out a good belly laugh that, if only for a second, was very genuine.

“How much do you actually know about me, Bob?”

He looked at me quizzically. He regained his self and approached me with his theory that seemed to puzzle him dearly. And like he was reading a headline, he said “atheists commits suicide in order to meet God.”

I sat there with no change in my demeanor. Bob, however, began to chuckle a great deal, even sending his pen flying out of his hand landing hard on the stack of papers. He grabbed his face to hide the redness. He was getting weaker by the second. I was beginning to think that I’d lose Bob. I realized how absurd an idea it was, and a damned good headline too. But, I had my reasons for doing what I’ve done and I didn’t expect anyone else to understand. I had more purpose for being here than I ever had on earth, taking in the air and continuing an existence that was at best unproductive and not destructive. Bob had to understand that, because no matter how much I would’ve hated Bob in my mortal life, I feel I might need him in this one. Bob might even be my ticket out of this hellhole and one step closer to God. I needed him back on my side.

“Let me ask you something, Bob.” Again, he looked at me puzzled. “Ya ever watch a movie that really sucked, and you got halfway through the movie, did you keep it goin?”

He looked as if he was thinking about it. I didn’t wait for a reply.

“No, you wouldn’t. Because the chances of that movie getting any better towards the end are slim to none.”

Bob looked as if he understood. He nodded a bit with his head facing front and his eyes cocked in my direction.

“So, you felt as though your life was a bad movie and you didn’t want to see it to the end?” he reiterated my statement.

“Yeah.”

He shrugged and nodded again. I was proving to be a difficult case for Bob, I'm sure. But, he wasn't aware of most of my issues regarding access into whatever heaven or place God may be hiding out in. I was never quite fond of the word 'atheist'. Anything ending with 'ist': terrorist, rapist, communist, therapist, dentist! It was a label that just sounded harsh. I was not a bad guy. I had a good heart. I would give the shirt off of my back for anyone in need (granted they didn't mind my hairy back). I was a very giving and loving person. And up until I shot myself in the head, I was a very selfless person. Even if I decided to take my own life, I figured it no one's business but my own. Not even God could have a say. He wasn't with me when I had broken bones, a broken heart or just downright broke. If he, God, had in fact given my life to me and that it wasn't mine to decide where I went or when it ended, then he had done a terrible job at making sure I had the means to make it worthwhile.

Maybe that's what I was all along, a busted machine with no free will. Maybe that's what everyone in this room was; Breakage, A slew of busted product waiting to be refurbished and sent to an outlet. But we were much more than malware. Oh yes, we were the ones that didn't comply. If there were no free will to life, we did the only thing we could and ended it prematurely. We were the ones who slipped through the cracks. We anarchized what should have been a golden road for us to follow, but we wanted more. And if we couldn't get it, to Hell with God's plan. We smoked up, drank up, and fucked up. That was the demographic here. That was predominantly all of us.

Bob sat there confused and lost, digging through his brain to find a way out. I realized he was doing this for me. No matter how much of a geek he was, I had to meet him in the middle. Salvation of my own soul would prove to be the only way to God. It made more sense to me that I find it here with Bob, where he was being more logical than Bill O'Pastor over there, putting me to sleep with that useless bible scripture.

I maintained an easier demeanor from then on out. I sat back and gave Bob the wheel. He regurgitated more questions for me. "Have you ever killed anyone else?" or "have you ever belonged to a certain religion?" No and no. It became very apparent to both of us that we were getting nowhere, fast. But I wasn't going to get down on the fact that my entrance into Heaven seemed to float further and further from my grasp. I tried to pull my own weight.

"There's a BBQ joint on the outskirts of Podunk, where I am from." Bob stopped his writing and gave me all of his attention, hoping for something-- ANYTHING that he could use. "It was called Carl's Big Boy BBQ. One time when we ate there, myself and a couple of my buddies..." He nodded. "I paid for the whole meal, about 75 bucks for three people."

"It must've been very good." He said.

"The best! How do you like your ribs, Bob?" he was becoming annoyed. "Fall off the bone or do you like to work for it?"

Bob threw his hand passed his face as if to swat off a fly. He was annoyed, but he played along "fall off the bone."

"I figured that."

He looked to be boiling up at this point.

"Best fall off the bone ribs you'd ever have."

Fever red annoyed.

"Anyways, I paid with my credit card, and when the waiter came back with the receipt, I noticed that he only charged me 43 dollars or so." I looked at him and he gave me no indication of light bulbs buzzing over his head. "I alerted the waiter and told him about the discrepancy and he fixed it...I paid the full tab—and I gratuitized well..."

Bob stared at me blankly. His silence was deafening. His gaze was louder than the pissing and moaning echoing around the room.

"Now serving B243 at door number 5."

I bugged my eyes out wider and nudged my face closer to his "I'm an honest man, Bob—"

"-Oh for fuck's sake!" he was shaking a little. "So, Mr. Bannester, when we go in there and were standing in front of St. Peter to plead with him not to send you into eternal damnation, you want me to tell him about a time when a waiter at big butts BBQ—"

"-Big boys"

"...Under charged a bill and you—"

"-It's just one example, Bob!" I threw my arms up and spread them out. "I'm an honest person..."

Of course I didn't believe that any of that information would prove valuable. At this point I was playing with Bob. He needed to lighten up; after all, I'm the one who's fucked here.

At all times, I'd use my dry form of humor to bring to life any draining situation, even if it annoys the other person. I found humor and sarcasm as the best way to deal with stressful situations. My wit had also been my favorite defense mechanism. This whole ordeal would be a long shot. I mean, who kills themselves and goes to Heaven? Considering there was such a place. Something like that was like spitting in God's face. I expected to see none of this. Not this room. Not a number. Not Bob. When I put that gun to my head and pulled the trigger, I expected nothing; Black.

Realization set in for both of us. There wasn't anything that Bob could do for me. It looked grim. Sometime, in what would seem like years, I would be walking through one of those doors and I will be facing my ultimate judgment. It was the last judgment to determine what they're to do with my unassuming soul. And St. Peter would know everything. There would be nowhere to run. He'd slam down a giant book or roll out an endless scroll and slowly read out every sin that I had committed (that on its own, taking another couple years). I would be escorted out of the room by Satan's minions and casted down to Hell to serve an eternity of pain and suffering. I'll be ripped apart and raped for the rest of time. Oh loving god.

Bob got up from his seat. He said he'd be right back. Yeah right, good riddance, buddy. Run! Run! Save yourself while you still can! I sat back in my stone chair and I continued to gawk at the lively crowd. This was living. Some would realize that faster than others. They would realize as I surely would, that Heroin McChester was right, it doesn't matter anymore, nothing did. Maybe nothing ever did. Maybe I was right all along and there is no one running this whole thing. Now is your chance. Make do with the rest of your time here, while you still have hands to grab, eyes to see, ears to hear and never give a single fuck to anyone ever again.

"Now serving B244 in door number 11."

I looked down at my ticket. I don't know why. It still brought torment to do that to myself. I was always playing god's game on his turf, on his dime, and nothing has changed. I was astonished to see that there was at least something after you died, however. It wasn't at all like the near-deather's testified about. Not at all like what the Bible said would happen. My time for judgment was creeping toward me so slow it felt like it was going backwards. Right now, I'm at the crossroads. It wasn't as it seemed, originally. Crossroads now meant something very literal. The crossroads, meaning you've been given plenty of time to think about your life and how you've lived. The sins you may have committed and the nice things you have done. At a crossroads where you may turn yourself over to the good graces of God and sit patiently to see if he bought it. If you haven't had free will before, there was certainly plenty of it now. But, looking around, I still didn't see any evidence of a god. In fact, it has pushed the idea further away from me. To look around and see all of these people, dead and still dying, slowly. Losing themselves in a crude, unjust environment. Meshed together were the sinners and the saints and all of them tired, worried, and powerless. A God who was a loving one would never put his children through such a test. I was not meandering around the idea that there was indeed a loving god or a god of any sort. I was diving into my subconscious in believing that this was the side effects of all life's experiences, gathered up and presented to you as one big cluster fuck. *

Is there really a God? Keith Bannester, an atheist journalist out of Podunk, OK, wants to know. So by way of suicide he enters an insane afterlife to find God, interview him and relay it back to earth via a psychic medium.

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