

Revelations

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Overnight, the rain had filled the concave tops of the barrels the Wilser's Bar patio used as tables. Tony dropped his half-finished cigarette in one of them as he left, hours later than he had meant to, for class. The sun was coming up, but pale grey clouds made the city look more like an unfinished painting than a new day. He spat, and it was pink-tinged. He ran a finger across his gums and sucked the saliva off it, spitting again to dispel the taste of the black gunk under his nail. He sighed deeply and scooped some water up from a barrel table to slick back his hair and splash his face. He scooped a little more to sip out of his palms. It tasted like ashes and stale beer, and his lips pulled back from his teeth as he sucked in cold air to cut the taste.

It was far from the first time he had gone to teach still drunk, but as the years caught up to him it felt less like he was getting away with something and more like something was getting away from him. When his wife left, he had begun to spend more time in the bar than in his awful new apartment. The silence of empty rooms was far worse than the jarring techno music he hated, grocery store wine far less soothing than a strong scotch rocks, and he was seldom awake while the off-licenses could still sell him that. He had skipped several classes already this semester. He would have to go in. He checked his watch; 7:52. His class started at 8:30. He'd make it by 8:50 if he caught the

next bus. It was a senior seminar on a Monday morning. He'd probably still beat most of the little bastards there anyway.

"Suffer the little children on to me," he muttered, wondering what kind of class truly cared enough about a few cancelled Christian Philosophy lectures to rat him out. He pondered the wavy line between piety and pretention and wondered if he could walk it.

His shoes had seen better days and he stumbled over the flapping soles on his way to the bus stop. He sucked his teeth and rolled his eyes towards a God who had a funny sense of humor. He wondered, briefly, if He was even there at all- but of course, He was. Tony had built his whole career around Him. Tony peeled a piece of chewing gum off the wall of the little bus shelter and pressed it down between the rubber sole and the lining of his destroyed right loafer. As he bent to his mending, the bus flew past him, nearly running over his toes. He sat back on the curb, legs splayed into the now-empty street. It was a tiny city and the buses only came hourly. His class was an hour and twenty minutes long, and he had definitely just lost his job. He weighed his options. He could sit here and wait for the next bus, run to the dean and plead his case. Or, he could turn around and get something to drink for breakfast. While it was decidedly the more appealing of the two, this option did require much more standing.

"Jesus Christ", he said to nobody in particular.

"You got that right, buddy," said the man he hadn't notice walk up behind him. Was he familiar? Tony rubbed his eyes and blinked hard. Was he a student? Surely not. He must have seen him in the bar, that's

all. "The bus system in this city is against us all. I have never once seen it come on time, and the first time it does, neither of us is there to catch it. What are the odds of that, huh?"

"The same as any other odds, I suppose." Tony's head was beginning to throb as the hangover crept in.

"What's that supposed to mean, any other odds? All odds are different. A car driving past right now is way more likely than a monkey falling from the sky."

"What makes you say that?" Tony was certain he had seen this young man before.

"The fact that we're on a street and not near any heavily populated aerial jungles?"

"But stranger things have happened, kid."

"Like what?"

"Like," Tony hoisted himself to his feet, leaning against the bus shelter for support. "The fact that you are standing there right now. The fact that this city was ever built. The fact that the universe is a thing we can see and touch but not measure. Everything in the world had a 99.99% chance of not happening. But there you are, in spite of it all, ruining my hangover."

"Oh, my sincere apologies sir. I promise this isn't how I was planning on spending my morning."

"You didn't have to plan it, it was going to happen regardless. But," he continued, noticing the other man's mouth opening to retort, "Me, either. Or, maybe it was exactly how I planned on spending my morning. I don't know. I don't know."

"How can you not know?"

"Can you know anything? Unless you are God, can you really know anything?"

"I know God isn't real."

"Okay. So prove that to me. Provide me with tangible proof there is no God."

"You can't see, hear or touch Him. There's no location for God, there's nothing in the world to suggest intelligent design."

"You don't think hiding all traces of intelligent design is a highly intelligent design?"

"I don't know why an all-powerful being who cares so much about us praying to Him and following His rules wouldn't leave some proof as an incentive."

"Heaven isn't an incentive?"

"No, not without some proof."

"But then wouldn't all acts of kindness and religious practice be shallow? You wouldn't be doing them to find out, or to grow. We have a responsibility to be better, that's the point. You have to *be* better because you *want* to be better and you want to make the *world* better,

not because there's an eternal reward. That cheapens it and makes your actions fragile. Any external change could shatter them."

The next bus pulled up to them, exactly on time, and Tony stepped quickly aboard, flanked by the young man who was not quite yet finished with the discussion.

"Yeah I completely agree," said the younger man as he turned to leave, a small smile tugging at his lips. "You gotta be better because you want to make the world better. Is that why you went into teaching?"

"Yeah, I guess so. But I guess I gave up on that. Or God did, I guess. All in the plan. You're one of my students, aren't you?"

The young man smirked. "You had a really good night, huh Professor?"

"I've had worse. Front row, three-seat in? Next to the nose ring guy?" Tony became all at once painfully aware of how few times this month he had seen any students at all.

"Not even close."

They were silent for a few stops, both obviously feeling the effects of the night before and allowing the other to suffer in peace. When the bus pulled up to the university, a shiver of dread ran down Tony's back. The courtyard was nearly empty, as it often was on Mondays. He would have nowhere to hide.

Tony pulled the cord nonetheless and stood, extending his hand to his student as the bus slowed. "It doesn't look like I'll be seeing you again, and I want to wish you luck."

The young man tilted his head. "I'm gonna see you in class tomorrow, I'm not *that* hungover. Why are you getting off now, Professor? The university's closed on Sundays."