

The Lobbyist

by Andrew Bowen

I covered my ears and squeezed my eyes shut. The voices—a thousand screaming, sobbing pleas, weren't coming from without, but from within. Only one week had passed since the Church declared me patron saint of entertainers for my martyrdom during World War 2, and therefore qualified to receive prayer. Already the pressure of was crushing me.

Playwrights, poets, songwriters, comedians...I was getting it from all over. A saint's job was to sift through them, like an agent through the slush pile, and pull out the ones worthy of representation. Most requests were vain: "Make me a star", or "Don't let my wife find out I had an affair with the assistant."

I shook my head and yelled, "Shut up!"

The other saints on the cliff overlooking the cosmos opened one eye and looked at me from their meditative positions. I sighed, set my chin on my palm, and stared down at Earth as the voices continued to pour in. That was supposed to be one of the perks of sainthood: the view. Kills me. Humanity spends so much time looking, praying, gazing at the sky—hoping for answers and a better place. Then, if you make it to Heaven and achieve the highest honor, sainthood, you're rewarded with an eternity to stare right back at where you came from.

The other saints went in and out of God's office, led by his secretary, the gnarly Ms. Transom, to represent the faithful. I had to walk by everyday to get home. I slowed in an attempt to eavesdrop, but Ms. Transom was quick to move me along.

"Good day, Saint Lenny," she said as I walked toward the door. A tingle, the way sweat used to feel as it dripped down my spine, spread over me. I glanced back. She winked and filed papers.

With time and the help of St. Stephen, I learned meditative techniques to help stream the prayers more efficiently. Instead of a

room full of screaming monkeys, my mind became more like the DMV. I sat on the edge of eternity and listened to prayers one by one. Despite my new skills, the same trash came through the pipes.

Then, just when I had doomed myself to monotony everlasting, something happened.

“Saint Lenny,” the voice of a mortal man pleaded, “My name is Alex Corbet and I've come to ask your help. I'm in the adult film industry. I started noticing some issues with my, uh, equipment and went to see a doctor. He diagnosed me with erectile dysfunction. Saint Lenny, I know you understand what I'm going through. I heard about how you died during World War 2 trying to bring a comedy routine to the front lines. People called you nuts, but you told them that joy and laughter were the language of God and that these boys had been without his voice for far too long. I know most might consider what I do a sin, but the joy it brings to me, my colleagues, and those who watch us...how could such a beautiful thing be cursed? I've got a shoot in five days. If I can't perform, I'm finished. Please ask for a cure—a miracle, on my behalf. I'm begging you. Amen.”

I ran to God's office and pushed through the line of saints. Out of breath, I set my hands on Ms. Transom's desk. “I need to speak to him.” I panted. “Now.”

Ms. Transom cocked her thin brow. Her forehead crinkled with loose, russet skin as she gently cleared her throat and fingered through the calendar. “God's booked until Thursday, honey,” she said and eyed me up and down as if I were a menu.

“Thursday is too late,” I said and lowered my head. “You've got to help me out here.”

Ms. Transom laid her crooked, arthritic fingers on mine. Her fingernails were bright red, as if she'd dipped them in blood. “I might be able to, fit you in...” she said. Her voice grew deep, raspy. I looked up as she smiled. Skin folded over her smile as she pursed her lips. Nauseous, I snatched my hand from hers and bumped into another saint as I ran out of the office.

An hour later, St. Stephen sat next to me on the cliff and offered a small glass of brown liquid. The tinge of liquor made my nose twitch.

I took the glass. "Scotch?"

"Johnny Walker. Black Label."

"How'd you get this?"

He smirked and squinted his brown eyes toward Earth. "God's easy to talk to, Lenny, it's his secretary who's a bitch to get past."

"I've noticed," I said and motioned with the glass.

"Sure, go for it."

The scotch went down smooth, like a cube of butter over a hot skillet.

"Man, that was good. Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Milk and honey gets old after a while." He took the glass and held it in front of his face as the light from stars and galaxies danced on its surface. "It's like prison commerce around here. Find out what people want and trade with them. If I didn't show up at the office with a fifth of this, Ms. Transom would never let me in."

"In that case, I'll never get through. I've got nothing. Poor guy. Should have thought twice about asking me for help."

"Ye of little faith," Steven said as he patted my back and stood. "We've all got something someone wants."

I thought about those guys from the war, on the front. An Army captain said the line was spread so far and thin, and that the Germans had all but surrounded them. The defeat in his eyes, streaked red with despair and fatigue, haunted me even in Heaven. "Those boys won't be getting a show, Lenny."

So I snuck out and joined the line on my own, cracking jokes one foxhole at a time. Bullets zipped by. Men screamed as medics amputated limbs. An hour into my "routine", a mortar round crashed beside a group of young men and me inside a bomb crater. Shrapnel and heat peeled my left arm and face away, leaving me shell-shocked and bleeding to death on the frozen earth. I remember listening in

on the eulogy. A corporal who was with me when I died said I went down with a smile on my face.

I looked down at Earth and imagined this porn star who'd asked for my help. I wondered what I had that could get me past Ms. Transom. Then it hit me. I vomited the scotch as the scene played out in my head, wiped my mouth, and walked back to the office.

Ms. Transom shut the door to God's office and walked toward her chair.

I approached the desk as she sat down and looked up at me. "Saint Lenny. So sorry, no openings—"

I ripped the white toga from my body. My dick was hard, but barely. I had played a mental flipbook of every pin-up girl I'd ever looked at as a teenager on the way to the office to get it. Ms. Transom's mouth, with her thin lips painted crimson, slowly parted to a glutinous smile.

She took it from behind for fifteen minutes, the longest, most traumatic, and disgusting fifteen minutes I'd ever face. But I did it. And as Ms. Transom wobbled toward God's office door to let me in, I knew that Alex Corbet's E.D. would be miraculously cured.

Ms. Transom held her hand out to a set of two simple, wooden chairs in the middle of a wide, white room. "God will see you momentarily." She pinched my ass and closed the door.

I sat down and fidgeted with my fingers and the hem of my garment. Then, footsteps came from behind me. Hands gripped my shoulders.

"Please, don't get up," a voice said, neither male nor female, but deep...more like a vibration than a sound.

I swallowed hard. "Hello, God. I—I'm here on behalf of Alex Corbet."

"Mmm, go on."

"He's been diagnosed with erectile dysfunction and, well in his job, and I guess other areas too...he needs it to work."

"Needs what to work, Lenny?"

I strained my eyes in an attempt to look down at the hands on my shoulders. There was nothing there. "His penis."

"Wasn't so hard to say, was it?" the voice said.

"Sort of."

The voice sighed. "I cannot cure Mr. Corbet's E.D. For the greater good, Lenny."

Anger and confusion rose in a swath of heat inside me. "What? You can't do this. He believes in me—in us! Please. It means the world to him and his fans."

"What good does it do to have the whole world and lose his soul?"

Jesus' quote deflated my resolve.

"Don't despair. Your sacrifice with Ms. Transom compliments your actions on earth. The Church was right to canonize you and mankind is blessed to have you as their representative."

"Then why won't you help him? All he wants to do is please others, like I did."

"Mr. Corbet, by mixing business with pleasure, had sex with a woman unprotected. He won't know it for a while, but he's contracted HIV. Erectile dysfunction has now...disarmed him."

I scowled. "You did this?"

No answer came.

"Well, what if he confessed his sins? Would you take the HIV away?"

The pressure released from my shoulders. I turned. God was gone.

I rushed out of God's office. There was someone else at the desk; a burly, red-bearded man with a Green Bay Packers hat on his head.

"Where's Ms. Transom? I need to talk to God again."

"Who's Ms. Transom?"

I stared at the man for a moment then shook my head. "Never mind, I need to see God again."

"Okay," he said and flipped through the appointment calendar. I craned my neck and peeked at the spaces. Each one was blank. "Looks like the next opening won't be until next week."

“Bullshit!” I set my hands on the table and bored my gaze into his eyes. “I need to see God and you're going to make it happen. Now.”

A smile slid over his lips. “I might be able to make something happen...” His callous fingers slid on top of mine. He cocked his eyebrow. “For a price.”

“What?” I looked down at his hand as it covered mine. I became sick and terrified all at once. Then I remembered my duty to Alex Corbet and anyone else, like me, who was born to entertain. I figured that if God had been willing to give up his son for mankind, and if Jesus had been willing to die on a cross, the least I could do was screw a Viking.

I slouched, took off my toga, and set my hands on my hips. “Alright, Eric the Red. You gonna pitch or catch?”

