

GOD'S FACE

by Dennis Hiatt

When I was nine, I unknowingly touched the face of God. I was a Cub Scout, and the face of God was a joke that was told to my little pack. The joke went as thus:

There was a fly that flew through a kitchen window and landed on a pound of baloney. When the fly had stuffed itself, it flew into the back yard and perched on the handle of a lawn mower. When the father of the family reached for the lawn mower, the fly flew off and dropped dead.

The moral of the story: don't fly off the handle when you're full of baloney.

Yes at nine, I too was seduced by the joke's cleverness and missed the main point. The hand of god point. Ten years later and eight thousand miles away, I lay in the dark, in the tall grass, holding a tourniquet tight around my left knee and listened to my friends scream as the North Vietnamese stuck knives into their bellies. They didn't find me and the next morning what was left of my company stumbled across me and my fly-covered hamburger of a left leg.

The face of God had showed itself again, and, again, I misread it.

Wooden legs aren't so bad once you're used to them and they're better for picking up girls than a happy, fat puppy on a rope. I even took karate. I had to kick with my left leg because one needs an ankle to pivot, and many kicks require pivots.

College, karate and cunts would describe my life in the late sixties and early seventies. God, as always, moved with me, I doing his bidding, and he, mine. I could have found him in U S History 203 or perhaps in Black Literature if I'd tried.

I could have found him in the math I loved or the young women I used. There was one day in particular when Sharr and I were at the museum when he flicked the head of my dick.

Sharr was an art major, slim as a daisy, and when she painted, she wore her long blonde hair in a French braid. She called me her blonde Vulcan, her racially pure angel. She painted me nude, sitting on a wooden kitchen chair, rubbing my stump. She got two hundred dollars for that oil and we blew it on coke and good grass and cheap, red wine.

One hot August afternoon, we went to see a Post-Modernist exhibit. We were standing in front of a piece called BILL'S RED HAIR. There was a fly circling the huge shadow-and-shit painting. The fly landed on it. I, still the fool, still the hurt, angry boy, thought the fly was an improvement, and said so. Sharr laughed and took my hand in her long slim fingers. Our hands were soft. Our palms were wet--and God's cute little message slipped right between my stoned fingers.

Priest, politician or pimp were jobs I was well-suited for. Insurance salesman was what I tried my hand at. And my hand was quite good. Oh, many the poor Mexican I showed my wooden leg and pointed to his fat children and small, brown wife. Dish-washers and bean-pickers signed up before my crippled onslaught. Rows of sympathetic housewives gushed and insured their husbands. Grandmothers and boys fresh out of high school built my first house.

This temporary job froze hard. Ten years in sales and I burned out and moved up into claims adjusting. God's will, God's work, God's face staring straight at me. I was five years on this job before God got in my face.

It was a cool, clear morning in late September. I was on my way to see a claimant. Bad Back she was, and I was going to give her the old we'll-keep-you-in-court-until-you're-fifty if you don't settle for a tenth of what you want. Was Mrs. Sharon Ann Chester a fake? She fit the profile like a fish fits a swim, but that was neither here nor was it there. My job was my job, and it was not to be her friend.

She was living in a by-the-day-week-month hotel on North McDowell Street. She'd been hit-and-run two blocks from there. Two blocks deeper into what might have been called a bohemian neighborhood. A Korean grocery named Glen's Market was next to the hotel, and cheek-and-jowls with it's bright walls was The Lost Planet Tavern.

Rusting cars lined the street, waiting perhaps for the gray people to drive them to small jobs or the welfare office. Door stoops housed winos and a fat, young street preacher with a slight stutter and polyglot clothes was waving a Bible and grunting forth the good news to a lone drunk who had what had to be an AID's ravaged face.

I put my "NO RADIO" sign in the window and locked my car. Briefcase in hand, I limped across the street. The fat boy slowed and paused as I drew near. As I came abreast of the wino, he sighed and said in a clear, educated voice, "Finding greatness in that book is as likely as finding good body and a pleasant bouquet in Kool Aid."

I didn't slow my limping to hear the preacher's reply if, indeed, he had any. It was seven AM and up the three flights of badly-lit stairs, she was waiting for me. Oh Sharon A didn't know she waited for me, and I rather hoped to find her asleep; cuddled in her hope and soiled blankets.

I hammer the door like a cop, "SHARON ANN CHESTER? OPEN UP PLEASE."

I could hear her moving about the room like a corpse sliding around in its coffin. The door opened a crack. I held my claims adjuster badge in front of my pin-striped

suit. She read, looked up to my face with an expression as smooth and blank as a private beach. The door fell half-open of its own accord.

I could see deep shadows in a piss-flop room. A window over the street was open, and from it the voices of the fat preacher and AIDs Face rose in disharmony. The pig-fat middle-aged blonde stared at me with squinting, China White eyes. Her narrow eyes widened as the voices in the street rose to a scream, "Michael? Michael Smith?"

I blinked, nodded and wondered what traitor in my office had warned this human sewage of my coming. Her fat bulged into a smile. "You haven't aged a day in fifteen years." She shook her head as if to shake off the heavy years.

"Sharr?" Horror dawned gray on my face and the stuttering preacher's voice thundered from the street: "Y-Y-YOU'RE A FLY ON S-SHIT! W-W-WHAT DOES A F-F-FLY KNOW OF THE G-G-GOOD B-B-BOOK?"

I dodged past her, and slammed the window shut. (No, still, I did not get it, but the knowledge was coming and it was near, very near.) When I turned she'd shut the door and let her house dress fall from her huge, white body. Sharr was crying. We had sex on the yellow bed for three hours.

Yes, I approved her fake claim. How often does a fly on shit see it turn to hamburger?

Do not ask God why the family of four is slaughtered in their sleeping bags in a state park. Do not question why dictators of vast horror live well in France. Ask him instead how long eternity stretches before and beyond your life time on earth.

Picture one atom of your DNA, a white atom. In front and in back are the black atoms of the rest of the goddamn universe. Not the moon river you thought it was, is it? (And yet God is busy watching, a truly interesting beast, the sparrow fall.)

Where is His Face? Where is His Hand? (I know! I know!)
It's like this: when I returned to the office that afternoon,
I found that I had been promoted to department supervisor.
I was to keep cost down. I picked a file at random. A woman
with breast cancer. I dropped her policy. That would cover
Sharr's ten grand.

God's pimp, fate's politician, office priest, my
college-educated mind sliced cost like karate cuts with the
vigor I'd screwed Sharr's love. Let the claimants scream in
the night or tourniquet their wounds--let them pray to
sparrows. Remember the fly that was full of baloney? No you
don't. It was a kid's joke. There was no fly. There was no
baloney and even if there had been a f-f-fly and if the f-fly
had died, it would have d-d-died just because it d-did.

God moves in mysterious ways. I move like God. We
mortals see his plan and we name it...RANDOM.

