

Holy Adam and Saint Jason

by Steve Young

"Where is my mom?" I think.

I shouldn't have to be here alone. I am twenty two years old, strung-out on methamphetamine and sitting in a courtroom. It is the third day of the murder trial. My son was the victim. He was only two and his mother's new boyfriend beat him to death.

He didn't use his fists. We never found out what he used. The detectives think it was one of the weights from a dumbbell set.

Where is everybody? Did they actually believe me when I said they didn't need to come, that I would be fine? My son's mom is here, but they have to keep us separated. The judge will not allow us to speak. I will find out why soon.

She is in the back row, with a freckle-faced girl of about twenty six. The girl's name is Jamie; she is the liaison between the courts and the victims. But she pays no attention to me. I am a man, she must tend to the female victim. I understand. But I'm all alone at my son's murder trial. I can't understand that. My brother is disabled; he can't make it. My sister has to work, she was here the first day but apparently believed me when I said I didn't need her to be there. But where is my mom? We have always excused her eccentricities, her weird way of seeing and doing things, but this was different. She should be here. I should not be alone. All my friends are high. They will not come. They can't; they can't even look at me anymore. They don't know what to say or do. I understand it, I accept it. I am mature for my age, but where is my mom?

Jamie comes and sits next to me right before the judge enters. We all rise, and sit again. Jamie is rubbing her fingernails lightly up and down my spine. She is trying to soothe me. Her legs are crossed and her high heel shoe has slipped off the back of her foot, and hangs precariously from the toes as it swings back and forth with the

rocking of her leg. I start to get a hard-on. This is sick. This is terrible. What the hell is this? I am ashamed, there is no control. I don't want it to happen, but that doesn't matter; it gets bigger and harder when I adjust my position to hide it. They bring in the jury.

The jury looks terrible. They all look like pancakes. Pancakes with butter pat noses and syrup dot eyes. Houswives, construction workers, cooks and secretaries. All wearing clothes that cover every thing but their hands and pancakes. They all look the same. I will never be able to remember a face, I will never remember a lot of things that happened during this time. The third day of the trial is called to order.

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I have to take the bus home. It is a long ride but only one bus, the red-line. It takes me from downtown Phoenix all the way out to Mesa. I have to walk three miles home or wait an hour for another bus. I choose to walk. People yell out of their car windows as they pass by. I can never understand what they are saying. I will never understand this phenomenon, screaming at pedestrians as you drive by. It brings me down to no end, and I can't figure out why. I am probably jealous, wishing I had a car instead of a long walk and a dope habit. I resolve to never scream at people when I do score a car.

The bus is crowded when I get on, but there is one seat available at the back, where it is just one long bench. I make my way back and sit down. The girl I sit next to is Mexican, around sixteen. She is beautiful in that way only found in the ghetto. Long black hair, too much make-up on her lips, and flecks of glitter around her eyes. She looks very bored. She is wearing short white shorts and a small, pink tank top. Somewhere around the airport she puts her hand between her legs. She opens them just a tiny bit. She starts to rub her crotch and make a low "mmm" sound. The bus is even more crowded now,

the aisles are full of people standing; swaying with the movements of the bus as it negotiates the long turns of the terminals. I look around, no one is watching. I look at the girl, she is staring out the window and saying "mmm." I stare at the hand moving up and down on her crotch, during a sharp turn she lets her knee fall against mine, opening her legs more. She looks at me. She looks very bored.

"mmm... you got a dollar man?"

I look her in the eye and tell her the truth. "No, I don't."

She takes her hand away from her crotch and stares back out the window. I wish I had a dollar.

I walk toward my apartment, twisting my head around occasionally to try and catch the colors of the Arizona sunset. I share the place with my mom and my friend Jason. My mom did not have any money or a job and needed a place to live. She knew Jason and I were drug users but she did not have a choice. It is a two bedroom; I let her use my room and I sleep on the couch.

I met Jason after my son died. He surely would have gone to court with me if I asked, but I could not ask that of him. Jason is always very busy. He is a hard working dope peddler and junk collector. He gets invited to a party at a hotel room and comes back with a mini-fridge, a television, a clothes iron and a hair dryer. He ends up getting dope or cash for all of it. His way of showing support is keeping me supplied with plenty of speed. I appreciate it very much.

No one is home at the apartment, a rare treat. I don't know where my mom is and don't care. I fish a fat roach out of the ashtray and light up. Soon I am stoned and sleepy. I curl up on the couch and fall asleep.

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The room is full of sun as Jason is shaking me awake. I might miss my bus. I might be late for court. Jason hands me the glass pipe with

a lighter. The pipe is full. *Thank you Jason.* I take four giant hits in a row. I am awake now. I stumble to the closet in my room. My mom is snoring under the sheets. The closet is empty. I fish around through the pile of dirty clothes on the floor. Everything is a wrinkled mess; I can't accept wearing dirty clothes to this trial, it seems disrespectful to my son. I flip on the light switch. My mom farts as she turns over. I am disgusted, with her and with myself for not washing clothes last night. I am either going to be an hour late or wear dirty clothes. I choose dirty clothes.

My pants look fine but my shirt is very wrinkled. I score a small rock from Jason for the day and run out the door. I walk the four miles double time and have to run to meet the bus. There is no seat. I stand the whole way, fifty minutes, paranoid that my shirt smells of mildew.

The fourth day of the trial starts the same as the others. I will not elaborate on the tedious details. It really is just like the movies or television, but there aren't as many good looking people and the whole process moves a lot slower. The lead prosecutor is named Karen. She asks the judge for a recess and motions for me to follow her into the hall. She is about forty years old, has short red hair and wears braces. (Although she seems to be very good, I can't get used to this, the person responsible for putting my son's killer away has braces.) We are outside the courtroom when she tells me why I am not allowed contact with my son's mom. The defense is going to accuse *me* of murder. Their plan is to say that my son died due to the effects of a beating he must have taken before I dropped him off at his mom's house. I am suddenly very glad I am high. I understand what she tells me, and I take her instructions. I am about to be called to the stand to tell what I know about what happened that day, and during cross examination the defense attorney will slowly imply that I hit my son regularly and eventually too much, most likely because I was still in love with his mom. We walk back in the courtroom.

The walk to the stand is how I imagined it. My clothes are wrinkled and I am sweating the sweat of the nervous meth user.

They swear me in, on a Bible. I guess they assume everyone is a Christian. Yes, I will tell the truth, I tell them.

On the stand I get my first good look at the guy who beat my son to death. He is a very average looking Mexican guy. Short brown hair, regular chicano features. It is the first time I see him clearly. He was always "in the bathroom" or not at home when I dropped off my son. In court he is always there and seated before I am allowed to enter the courtroom, and even then he is surrounded thickly by bailiffs and correction officers, so that you can only catch a small glimpse now and then. He doesn't look like much. I am sure I can take him and am lost in a fantasy of ways to do it. I answer the prosecutor's questions through a fog.

I am still staring at him when the defense attorney stands and asks,

"Frank, are you still in love with Sara?"

I understand immediately that he is trying to rattle me with a direct approach, but I am high and strangely calm.

"Love is a relative term," I reply.

"You must answer the question yes or no," he tells me.

I look at the judge and shrug my shoulders. "That really isn't a yes or no question, your honor. What does he mean by 'love?'"

The judge agrees and tells the defense attorney to clarify his questions.

We continue in this vein for what seems like two hours. The defense attorney asks me unanswerable questions and I tell the judge they are unanswerable. The defense attorney asks the same questions over and over again. Hoping to catch me, catch me what, I don't know.

I step down from the stand, keeping an eye on the defendant. I haven't stopped staring at him the entire time. He does not look at me once. I take my seat on the bench and realize I am shaking badly. My son's mom is sequestered somewhere and Jamie is with her. I am alone.

I am told I will not be allowed back in the courtroom for the remainder of the day's session. They are going to do much the same

thing to my son's mom that they did to me, and I cannot be there to influence her answers.

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It's just past noon when I step out onto the sidewalk. I walk across the street to a small park with an amphitheatre in it. I sit on the steps of the amphitheatre and light a cigarette. I decide to call my friend Adam and ask him to come pick me up. It is a big favor to ask, since he lives in Mesa and his car is a piece of shit. I just can't stomach the bus ride today. I cross back to the other side of the street and pick up the payphone.

Adam is home and agrees to come get me. I can tell he doesn't want to, but what kind of friend would he be if he refused to pick me up from my son's murder trial? He has to come, and he knows I wouldn't take advantage of that fact unless I was desperate.

"I'm desperate," I tell him.

"About two hours," he says.

I am grateful. I waste the time walking and sitting, I sneak into the restroom of the Hyatt and blow two small lines off the back of the toilet.

The two hours have passed and no Adam. I am standing in the spot where we planned to meet but he hasn't shown. I am getting nervous. What if he doesn't show? What if his car breaks down? What if he is just sick of my troubles and says fuck it? His beat-up Toyota screeches to a halt across the street. I am overjoyed. I run through traffic to the other side of the car. Adam peers at me through a dirty windshield and giant black-rimmed glasses. He is a vision from Heaven. A friendly face in the middle of madness. Holy Adam! You came! We drive away, and get drunk at his apartment. Jason comes over to join us. He needs to tell me something, he says, but doesn't know how. He knows why I am alone in court.

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Before the trial, my mom took a Greyhound to Tucson, why, we don't know. She asked our neighbors' daughter to go with her and keep her company. Jason and I had been screwing this girl since we moved in, so she told Jason the whole story...

God had revealed the truth about my son's murder. It was his own mother, Sara. Sara had become angry and beat him to death and I and the police were too dumb to see it. My mom refused to be in the same building with a woman who would kill her own child and was waiting for the truth to come out in the trial.

I sit and listen, I am dumbstruck. What I am hearing is swimming upstream against the booze and drugs and slowly taking shape in my brain. I am sick. I am sick with rage, and I feel betrayed. True betrayal makes you dizzy.

This is why I am going through this hell alone? Because of another one of my mother's delusions? It is too much. I ask Jason to take me to the apartment. He is nervous; I have to promise I won't do anything crazy. We drive home.

I throw the bedroom door open and my mom looks up at me. She sees that something is wrong. She is sitting in the middle of the bed with her Bible open in front of her. She closes it and zips the leather cover.

"You!" I say, pointing at her. "I know! I know everything! Get the fuck out of here and take all of your shit with you! NOW!"

I have never spoken to my mother like this. She is scared. She starts to shuffle around the room. She looks very small, and old.

"But, Franky, where will I go?"

"I don't give a fuck!" I scream. "You have two hours, get the fuck out of here!"

She doesn't ask what I know, and I take this as a confession of guilt. Jason and I leave. We drive back to Adam's apartment. The lights are off and when I knock he does not answer. He has had enough today. I don't blame him. Jason and I drive around smoking speed and drinking Boones. He says nothing of the whole situation. He talks of other, innocuous things and passes the pipe and bottle to me regularly. God bless him.

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I do not go to the fifth day of the trial. It is a Friday, and I was told they will be showing blown-up pictures of my son's dead body to the jury. The prosecutor wanted me to be there, so the jury could witness my reaction. I am home and stoned, thinking about how sick that is. I am so sleepy the speed will not work anymore. I would just be wasting it. I smoke joints and sleep for a couple hours. I remember to do laundry and stay awake long enough to finish it. I am sleeping when Jason comes home, but wake up to take the bowl of noodles he offers.

The weekend passes too quickly. Jason is gone most of the time and I stay in. I have a lot of pot and plenty of speed. I sit on the couch for hours listening to music, or sit on the floor for hours playing the guitar. Time passes in a brown fuzz, and Monday morning finds me wide awake and dreading court. I walk to the bus stop.

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Jamie tells me Sara didn't show for Friday either, and that she cried a lot when she took the stand after me on Thursday. She asks if

my mom will be here this week. I tell her no and thankfully she doesn't pursue it. The pancake jury files in and is seated.

The sixth and seventh day of the trial are filled by expert witnesses. Doctors describe why they are experts, and then give brutally frank medical findings:

The trauma to the head was the approximate equivalent of a four story fall.

The retinas were detached, suggesting that the victims head was tossed about violently due to shaking.

The cavity was full of blood.

And on, and on, and on. Each time the attorney for the defense stands to ask questions, he bumbles them. He can't think of the right word, or can't find his notes and shuffles papers for five minutes at a time. I suddenly wonder if he is throwing this case purposely because the guy is so obviously guilty. I don't spend time thinking about it. I am now terribly sick of the whole thing. Let him go, I think. Fuck it. Let him go, I'll kill him quick and we can be done. I leave early, my stomach in knots.

The next two days are uneventful. As I said, it is just like television but slower. I am so strung-out on meth and booze I barely feel alive on the last day of the trial. It is Friday, everyone will make a closing statement and the jury will deliberate. I take a last look at the jury, they are just familiar pancakes now. The jury leaves, and so do I.

Jamie finds out I have been taking the bus and informs me the county will pay for a taxi to take me back and forth to the trial. I can't believe it. She tells me that is how Sara has been getting here and I realize I never even wondered about that. Jamie tries to joke with me about it, but I am livid.

"Why didn't you mention it?" I scream.

"Those bus rides were pure hell!" I yell at her.

She starts to cry. "I'm so sorry Frank, I—I, this is my first murder trial..." she trails off and starts to sob. She is also sick of the whole thing. I pull her in for a hug and tell her it's o.k. She calls my cab.

As soon as I close the door to the cab the driver looks at me and tears up.

"You," he says. "Me and my wife saw you on TV. I'm so sorry about your son."

This does it; I start to cry. I cry like a baby all the way home. It does not make me feel better. I am exhausted, and strung-out, and I have not been eating anything. It is all too much. I start to wonder what a real nervous breakdown feels like. I trudge up the stairs and retreat to the safety of my pot and my now vacant bedroom.

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My sister has come to pick me up. It is Monday morning and this marks the jury's first day of official deliberation. The longer they deliberate, the less chance of a guilty verdict, is what I am told.

We wait in the cafeteria of the courthouse with Jamie, Sara and her mom. Sara and I speak to each other for the first time since the trial started. It is awkward.

"You're wearing wrinkled clothes," she says.

"I know."

"You never wear wrinkled clothes."

"I know."

That's all we can say. She is exhausted too.

At two p.m. the jury has a decision. We return to the courtroom. The murderer's family is there in force. It is a crowd of fat Mexican women. They smile at me. I want to murder every one of them. I just look away. We all rise as the jury enters.

Has the jury come to a verdict?

Yes. Guilty of second degree murder and felony child abuse.

The fat Mexicans scream wildly, I think they are praying in Spanish. A bailiff scrambles over to our bench and orders us to stay put. I guess that he thinks the fat Mexicans will attack us. The jury

is excused. I stare after them. Many of them turn to look at Sara and me. There are little streams of syrup coming out of their eyes.

My sister takes me to a bar and asks what I would like to do. I try to eat a sandwich and drink beer, then ask her to take me home. She stops at a liquor store for me and I buy a big bottle of tequila. I tell her I am going to celebrate, she laughs nervously and drives away. I trudge up the stairs. Jason and I start to drink and smoke, and Adam comes over. That is all I remember about that day.

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I awake the next morning and see the empty bottle of tequila still in my hands. I hear voices and notice Adam and Jason sitting on the couch. I am sprawled on the love seat. They are sharing a joint and talking quietly. The blinds are closed, but the morning sun shining through them fills the room with an orange glow. Adam and Jason sit in the glow, wrapped in a blue veil of marijuana smoke; they look like angels. Holy Adam and Saint Jason. I try to speak but nothing comes out. Jason passes what's left of the skinny joint. I take it. I wonder if I will ever be able to tell them how grateful I am that they are here.

