

We're All Guys Here

by Thomas Pluck

The doorbell rang while Ron was masturbating.

He closed his eyes tight. Tried to hold the image of Lori bent over the arm of the couch. No use. It was gone. Ron sighed, then levered the recliner down. Tied on the terry-cloth robe Lori had given him. He kicked aside an empty pizza box on the way to the door. Her goddamn dog had chewed it to shreds.

Through the window, two tall, young men in fleece coats. Hands in pockets, breath frosty. Ron opened the inner door and talked through the Plexiglas. Maybe they were cousins of hers, coming back for her things. But there was no truck in the driveway.

“Yeah?”

The kids stepped toward the storm door.

“Hello, sir. We're from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Would it be alright if we spoke with you for awhile?”

The skinny one on the left had eager eyes and black hair. He did the talking. His partner had a crew-cut and wouldn't look Ron in the face.

Ron's breath fogged the window. If those kids were pulling a scam or something, he'd fix them.

“Thought you were the mail man. Come in,” Ron said.

Ron pushed the door open and the kids followed him in. Sun glared through the double windows, but the blinds were up, so it was dim inside. The hedges needed trimming. Ron would have to get to that before the landlord started bitching. All that shit-work for fifty bucks off the rent.

“So, Jehovah Witnesses?” Ron snorted and swallowed. The winter months brought a cold he couldn't shake.

“No sir, we're from the Church of Jesus Chri-”

“Mormons, right? The commercials, the kid who breaks the window with the baseball?” Ron put his hands on the back of a chair, nails picking at the wicker.

The black-haired kid smiled and nodded.

Ron looked over the table. The Ruger perfectly cleaned, the oily newspapers, the ramrod, the grey polishing cloth. White boxes from the Chinese take-out joint, stained an oily tan at the bottom. A half empty bottle of Wild Turkey, uncapped since last night's dinner, stood next to the black revolver.

"We'd like to talk to you about Jesus, and what he means to you," the black-haired kid said, turning to nudge his partner, who held back.

"So, you guys keep a list of deadbeat Catholics or what?" Ron chuckled. What the hell, he thought. These kids beat Maury any day.

Crew Cut got nudged again and took some pamphlets from his coat. He broke the rubber band around them as he fumbled one out of the pack.

Ron stared until the kid picked the band up off the floor like a dead fly.

This kid was a riot. Ron swiveled the chair around and straddled it. "So. Tell me about God."

The kids looked at the table and the chairs and Crew Cut sat down, jerking when he noticed the pistol. Big and shiny with oil. The black-haired kid didn't sit, and his pal didn't get back up.

Ron picked between his front teeth with a corner of the pamphlet.

"Um. " The black-haired kid fumbled, unzipping his coat, a long sound in the quiet room.

Ron grinned, his thick black mustache bristling. "You guys got names?"

Ron looked at the pamphlet. It had a picture of two parents and two kids on the steps of a brownstone smiling at each other, and read "Christ in America."

"I'm Jerry," said the black-haired kid, as he rested his hand on the shoulder of his thin friend. "And this is Tom."

"Okay, Jerry and Tom. You want me to tell you about God?" Ron took half a cigarette from the ashtray and lit it with paper match. The matchbook read Galaxy Auto Body. The body shop where he used to work. Stupid fuckin' name. He'd told his dumb fuck boss not

to call it that, but the guy's wife suggested it. She was always coming up with ideas for the place. He'd still be there if she didn't think she ran the place.

The boys were quiet as he sucked the Marlboro into an orange glow.

"If there's a God, he's laughing his ass off right now, pals." Ron sniffed and looked at them. "That's what I think."

"Maybe we should leave, sir." Jerry edged toward the door.

Ron shook his head. "No, stay. Talk a while. I'll save you guys a load of trouble." He stood, and opened a cabinet. He took out two rocks glasses and put them on the newspapers. Then he took his own out of the sink.

"You want ice? I don't like ice." Ron ran some warm water into his glass.

"We...we don't drink." Jerry licked his lips.

Well, scaredy-cat got some balls, Ron thought. He stared up into the boy's hazel-grey eyes, but the kid held his ground.

"No. No, thank you."

Ron looked at Crew Cut and picked up the bottle of Wild Turkey, watching him shake his head and shiver like a sparrow.

Ron poured, the amber-brown tainting the water, staining it chestnut. He sat across from them again. The kids didn't have to drink. They just had to listen.

"So, we're talking about God?" He ground out his cigarette and drank. "God made us all in his own image, right? I mean, that's what they say."

The black-haired kid took a step forward, stopping right behind his friend's chair. He exhaled. "Yes, Mister."

"Ron. Call me Ron. I mean, we're all guys here. How old are you guys, maybe seventeen, eighteen? High school?"

They nodded.

Ron grinned, memories filling his head. "You want to know about God? God's a jerkoff."

The standing kid's lips cracked open, froze.

"I mean, why would he make us, anyway? To push us around? He made women out of our rib, so we chase â€˜em like a dog with a bone. We're his ant farm and the Devil's God's magnifying glass. That's it. Yeah."

Ron drank more bourbon, the afternoon sun glinting through the glass. He rapped the glass against the tabletop. "Yeah."

"But," Crew Cut said, and choked up. He swallowed and sucked at his lips.

"No butts. I got it. We're like dogs. Fucking dogs," Ron kicked the pizza box under the table. "Goddamn dogs. You can beat the shit out of them, and they keep coming back. Tail between their legs, whimpering."

As Ron finished off the glass, he thought of Lori and her fucking dog. The mutt puked in her car and she didn't care, but she threw a fit when Ron scratched her fender. He'd been doing her a favor, fixing up that piece of shit.

"You guys got dogs?"

"No," the black-haired one said. Crew Cut nodded a little.

"Say. What's your name again? You ever talk?"

Tom croaked a soft reply as more bourbon gurgled into Ron's glass.

"You got a dog?"

"Uh-huh."

Ron watched their eyes flicker from his face to the gun.

"What kinda dog?"

"A...cocker spaniel." Tom rubbed his hands in his lap, his padded nylon gloves rustling.

"Yeah, Lori... bitch used to live here, she's got a mutt I think had some cocker in him. Fucking dog. Yeah, they always come back. You know why?" Ron's chair scraped against the floor as he pulled in closer.

"Because they know you got the food, that's why. You can kick them right in their ass and they come back, â€˜cause they know you got the can opener."

The kid with the dog winced.

"Oh," Ron wrinkled his nose. He pointed to the gun and watched them flinch. Ron picked up the Ruger. Heavy in his hand.

"This here's a Ruger Blackhawk. .357 magnum. It ain't loaded. I was cleaning it," Ron laughed. "Isn't that what they always say? I was cleaning it and it went off? When they blow their wife's face off? You got to be pretty stupid to clean a loaded gun. You gotta look right down the barrel to make sure all the lead is gone. You gotta be pretty dumb to point a loaded gun at your face, right?"

The kids stared quietly.

"Right?" The newspaper hissed against the table as he looked for the metal cleaning brush.

The boys nodded in unison.

Ron smiled. "Tom and Jerry, like that cat and mouse, in the cartoons."

He watched the grins play across the boys' faces. They'd heard that one before.

"I always wanted the cat to eat that little fucker." He took a long draw at the bourbon, and tapped the glass against the table. "Didn't you?"

Crew Cut glanced up from the table and said, "Um, yeah, like the roadrunner and the coyote?"

"See? I knew you could talk. So, what the fuck was I saying?"

"Dogs?" the black-haired one said.

"Yeah, dogs. We're like dogs...we need the food. Women can spit in your face, they can tear us down in front of our friends, in front of our family, treat us like we're shit on their shoe, yeah, and we come back. Cause you got your sex food, your love food...make you feel like you're worth more than shit food...they got it. Those bitches got it. You do whatever the fuck they want. Trust me. Just like dogs. Is there some commandment against that shit? If there ain't, there oughtta be.

Lori. The shit he put up with. She'd slap him in the face, and he never laid a hand on her.

"But sir," the black-haired one said.

"Ron."

“Ron, that's not what it's all about-”

“You're young. You don't know. I mean, come on, you got girlfriends, right? I remember high school. Now they get the blow job out of the way first thing, so you know you who's boss. You ever fuck in the back of a car?” Ron grinned, “Come on. I remember high school. Cop ever tap on your window? ~Cause it's all fogged up? Scared the shit out of me. Nearly caught my prick in the zipper trying to get in the front seat. Never happened to you?”

Crew Cut blushed. The other one wrinkled his nose, then tried to iron it out.

“You want to say something? Say it. Come on, we're all guys here.” The two little faggots. The tall smart-ass looked like he just stepped in shit.

“You think I'm drunk? Is that it? Jesus fuckin' Christ.”

“No, I just think you're upset about something, you're angry, and maybe you need to talk to someone. Like your pastor,” the black-haired kid managed with his cracking voice. “I understand what you're saying, I just think-”

Ron put his glass down hard.

“So, what do you think? I wanna hear.” Ron leaned back in his chair, and the boys' eyes pulled toward the door. “Go ahead. Tell me what you think.”

“I think,” the black-haired kid closed his eyes a moment, coughed out a small breath. “Listen. I've had my heart broken, I've been rejected. I asked a girl I was seeing to the junior prom, Mona Crosby, remember, Tom? She said no, out of nowhere, that she was going with this guy from the track team. I felt bitter, and I wanted to hurt her back, but God says in Romans, to leave vengeance to him. He will repay. And it hurts. I mean, you have to have something to fall back on. And that's what faith does for you.”

“Well, that's fuckin' brilliant,” Ron sneered. “Thanks for sharing that with me. I'm impressed. This bitch I've been supporting for two fuckin' years decides to take her smelly mutt and go home to her fat guinea mother, and you want to tell me about faith? Huh? Dumb bitch throws me out like a used scumbag, now that I'm outta work,

and I'm supposed to fall back on Jesus? Is he gonna pay my fuckin' rent?"

Ron stood up, pacing and jabbing with the gun as he spoke. "Well, no thanks. I already gave him a few thousand Hail Mary's and Our Father's and a few dozen Acts of Contrition, sitting in the booth with some wrinkled old priest getting off on my confessions, probably jerking off in there for all I know. I'll stick to Wild Turkey. Stronger than wine and tastes a lot better than communion. Those tiddlywink cracker things. Body of Christ, my ass. And you fuckin' Jehovah Witnesses, you go door to door like you're selling Jesus like Girl Scout cookies--"

"We're not Jehovah's Witnesses, sir, we're from the Church of Jesus Christ."

Ron cocked the Ruger. The well-oiled click shut the boy up like a smack in the face.

"You want to meet Jesus?"

Crew Cut was the first out the door. He hit it with a crack and was gone. The other kid froze, lip quivering.

"Huh?" Ron shouted, sending the boy on the heels of his friend.

The storm door swung shut, didn't latch. The wind slapped it open again.

"Probably shit his pants," Ron laughed.

He sat down at the table, chuckling. Huddled over the newspapers musky with the scent of gun oil. Rested his head against the gun's cool barrel.

Faith. Those kids were a riot. What the hell did they know? Kids don't know their ass from a hole in the ground. Faith. He knew all about faith.

Lori had to come back for her shit sometime. He'd teach her about faith.

Ron didn't stop chuckling to himself until the cold metal left a red mark against his cheek.

