

GRIEVANCE

A dialogue

John Shanahan

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At right, a desk with a metal folding chair behind it. In front of it, about two feet back, a white plastic chair, like a patio chair.

DENNIS KAVANAUGH, *a man in his late 20s to mid-30s, paces angrily, and with good reason. He's been shot three times: once in the stomach, once in the chest, and once in the leg. The bullet holes and blood are quite visible on his tee-shirt and his jeans. Dennis is scruffy, unshaven for a few days.*

After a few moments, GOD enters and stands next to the desk. The role can be played male or female. Whichever is chosen, God is smartly dressed, in a formal shirt with the cuffs buttoned (neck can be open) and pressed khakis. God is barefoot.

At God's entrance, Dennis turns.

GOD You wanted to see me?

DENNIS *(taking a few hard steps forward)* You're damn right I do! Who do you think you are?

GOD I'm not sure what you mean.

DENNIS *(vaguely pointing to his chest and stomach wounds)* This! This is what I mean! You think this is funny?

GOD *(sitting behind desk)* I imagine not.

DENNIS Damn right it's not! Ha ha ha.

GOD I don't understand what the problem is.

DENNIS The problem is that three days ago I won the fucking lottery!

GOD Language...

DENNIS Screw that! Screw you! I win the lottery and before I can even enjoy it you have me *shot?* Benevolent God my ass!

GOD You should sit down.

DENNIS *(challenging)* Maybe I don't want to.

GOD Fair enough.

DENNIS Oh, so *now* you're all understanding. Great.

GOD We can talk about this if you want.

DENNIS Gee, do you think that might be why I'm here? Are you sure you're God?

Pause.

GOD We can talk about this if you want. But we're not going to get anywhere if all you do is insult me and accuse me of things without explaining what the problem is.

DENNIS I just did! I won the lottery!

GOD That's a problem?

DENNIS Are you even listening to me? You want the problem? Here's the problem: I won a shitload of money and three days later, I get shot. Dead. I'm dead when I'm supposed to be a mutli-millionaire. That would be the problem.

GOD You should sit down.

DENNIS Is that a commandment?

GOD No. But we may be a while. You should at least be comfortable.

DENNIS Going to be a while, are we? Geez, are you sure you can spare the time? Don't you have other people's lives to dick with?

GOD I multitask well. (*He smiles wryly.*) Dennis, do you think you're the only one with a grievance? I get a lot of them, you know. Some are more interesting than others. As a matter of fact, at this very moment I'm also talking to man from Belarus who committed suicide out of the sheer embarrassment of being stricken with chronic flatulence, which he blames me for. Meanwhile for the past decade he's been living on a diet largely based around a lot of pickled cabbage. Yours is a little more serious than that.

DENNIS I'm more serious than a guy with a bad case of the farts? Oh, thank you. I'm blessed. Awful nice for the guy who had me shot three—

GOD Three days after winning the lottery. I understand that.

DENNIS Oh, so you admit it.

GOD I said no such thing.

Pause.

DENNIS Do you know how much money I won?

GOD I understand it was quite a bit.

DENNIS You know exactly how much.

GOD No. I don't keep track of things like that.

DENNIS Me and five of my buddies split a one hundred and thirty seven million dollar jackpot.

Pause. Dennis is staring expectantly at God.

GOD You'll have to help me out here. I'm not particularly good at math.

DENNIS Get out.

GOD Honestly. But then again, I did create the heavens and the earth, so most days I don't fret about the math.

DENNIS I walked away with eleven million dollars after taxes. And then you killed me.

GOD It occurs to me that this is the part we need to work out. This whole belief that I had you killed.

DENNIS Well, I'm dead.

GOD Yes, you are.

DENNIS And so...?

GOD What makes you think I singled you out?

DENNIS The timing! Look at the timing! An average schmuck like me, a guy who works hard his whole life just to get by, finally hits it big and *(His fingers like a gun at God)* boom? I rest my case.

GOD You should sit down.

Dennis sighs, shakes his head, and finally sits.

DENNIS There. Good? Now can you just admit that you had me killed?

GOD You know, by your reckoning, I must have also made you win the lottery.

DENNIS No, no, no, no—that was me. *I* played those numbers.

GOD Where did the numbers come from?

DENNIS My kids' birthdays and my wife's birthday.

GOD Wife and kids?

DENNIS *(hard)* Yeah. Wife and two kids, you bastard.

GOD Dennis....

DENNIS *(sarcastic)* Oh, forgive me.

GOD So you chose to play the lottery that day.

DENNIS Yeah. Me, Dougie, Chuck, Luis, Ricky, and Taylor from the mail room. We went in on some tickets.

GOD And you chose the numbers.

DENNIS On my tickets, yeah.

GOD *You* chose.

DENNIS Yes! Yes! Are you getting this? Yes.

GOD How did you get shot?

Pause.

DENNIS You know this.

GOD I understand there was a fracas—

DENNIS *Fracas?*

GOD It's a word.

DENNIS Not one I've heard too much.

GOD I've been around. There was an altercation, correct?

Dennis stares at God a moment and shakes his head in disbelief. As he speaks, he rises.

DENNIS I can't believe I have to go over this. All right, look. Yes. Me and the guys, a couple of our wives, we all go out to celebrate. And we're getting loud and we're getting happy—I mean, Christ almighty, we just won eleven million bucks each. And some jerks at another table start some shit with us. We'd been drinking, you know? We didn't want to bother anybody, but these chuckleheads just start in. Next thing I know, Chucky's swinging at somebody and then it's on, you know? And everybody in the joint all of a sudden is—there's bodies everywhere and it spills into the street. We're in traffic, and I got two guys punching me and—and I just....

He's at a loss. He hangs his head for a few beats, then looks up at God. He looks as if he's going to continue, then just sighs and raises his hands. He walks to the chair and sits.

GOD Why do you carry a gun, Dennis?