

—BEING SUPREME

by Mark Justice

“I used to be God, you know.”

Rusty put another beer and shot in front of the old drunk. “Uh-huh,” he said.

“It’s true,” the old man said. He dropped the shot into the beer glass like a depth charge, then guzzled the whole thing in one long swallow. Slamming the glass down on the bar, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve. “You don’t know how much I missed that. There’s no booze in Heaven. Isn’t that odd?”

“Uh-huh.” Rusty wiped the bar down with a damp rag. Tuesdays weren’t exactly prime time at Muldoon’s. A few regulars. Some college kids tossing darts in the back. And this guy. He looked like he’d been on a bender for twenty years. He was too skinny for the suit he wore, and he needed a shave.

On the plus side, he had cash. He’d slid a C-note over the bar when he arrived. As far as Rusty was concerned the guy could sit there all night. Even if he did used to be God. Rusty wondered if somebody left the gate open up at the county nut-hatch.

“You don’t believe me, do you?”

Rusty gave the drunk a non-committal smile. “Set you up again, Pops?”

“Pops,” the old man said. “I like that. ‘Pops.’” He smiled, as if he enjoyed the way the word felt in his mouth. “And you may set me up again.”

Rusty fixed up another boilermaker. After his first sip, the old man smacked his lips. “Delicious! You know I haven’t been drunk for a very long time?”

“Yeah? You religious or somethin’?”

The old man found that to be hilarious. He laughed for a full minute, gradually slowing to a chuckle. Finally, he removed a frayed handkerchief from his pants and wiped his nose. “Sorry. You know, when I was a kid I was a churchgoer, only because my grandparents made me. When I got old enough to stop going, I did. Maybe I would have come back to the church, but let me tell you, brother, there’s nothing like spending a few decades as God to drive all the religion right out of you.”

Rusty didn’t know what to make of the guy. He was obviously bat-shit, but his story was entertaining. Since it was a slow night and he could only wipe the bar down so many times, he decided to humor the Drunk Formerly Known As God.

Rusty smiled. “Tell me about it, Pops,” he said. “Unless there’s some, you know, God code of silence.”

“That’s good. A code of silence. In fact, they do have a system in place to keep any ex-God from talking. You want to know what it is?”

“Sure.”

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The old man leaned forward. He crooked his finger to beckon Rusty closer. "They drain your brain. Suck every memory of the God experience from your head. Then they leave you drooling and senile, pissing yourself in some alley."

"Who does this?"

The old man raised one eyebrow. "Why, the angels."

"The angels," Rusty said, like it made perfect sense. "Sure. But let me ask you something."

"Why didn't they erase my memories?" The old man dug deep in a pocket. He slapped something down on the bar. It looked like an old-school pager, the kind you used to see back in the eighties and nineties. "Because of this."

"What is it?"

"It doesn't matter. You couldn't pronounce its name. And if I spoke it aloud your head would explode. Man can't hear the language of God."

"Right." Rusty picked up the object. It was black plastic, and it weighed about as much as a Zippo lighter. He turned it over in his hand but he couldn't find a button or switch or even a jack to charge the battery. A crazy man's toy. Rusty set it down next to the old man's beer. "What's it do, Pops?"

"It hides me from them."

"The angels?"

"Specifically, the Seventh Host. They're the hunters, the cops of Heaven. They take care of the problems. Problems like me." Pops drained his glass. With a flourish, he slid it across to Rusty. "Again, my friend."

As Rusty returned the full mug and another shot, Pops tapped his plastic device. "But there's something else this baby does."

"Yeah?"

"Yes, sir." Pops dropped the shot glass into the mug, then drank from the glass until he had emptied it. He slammed the mug to the bar. With one gnarled finger he caressed his plastic box. "This shields me from Azrael."

"Come again?"

"The Angel of Death."

"Oh," Rusty said. "That guy."

"Exactly," Pops said. "And, of course, you know what that means."

"Uh, not really."

"I. Can't. Die." Pops pounded the bar once for each word.

Rusty glanced around the bar. The group playing darts stopped to stare. The regulars never looked up from their drinks.

"Okay, okay. You can't die. Now why don't you settle down and I'll fill you up again."

Pops smiled at the offer, sitting in silence until Rusty had replenished his drink.

"So," Rusty said. "If you can live forever, what are you going to do with all that time?"

Pops wiped foam off his lips with the back of a liver-spotted hand. "You're looking at it, kid."

Rusty laughed. Usually he found the nutjobs to be a real pain in the ass. But Pops here was quite the amusing character.