

ARBITRATION

(e-edition)

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First Edition

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ARBITRATION – ACT I

Me? My name's Chris, Chris Stone. Let me tell you. I swear in the name of almighty God - this is how it happened.

I was riding the subway approaching Lexington and 59th. It was maybe three, four months after the *incident*. I don't wanna talk about the *incident*. I ain't ready for that yet, and even if I was, you're not ready, trust me on that. Look, let's just say, she came home unannounced. Not that it's any of your business, but the woman totally misread the situation. You know how they do. My wife's a nurse for Christ's sake; she should recognise the god-damned Heimlich manoeuvre when she sees it. I'll explain to you, like I tried to explain to her. The girl was choking to death, and no, I don't know how the condom came to be stuck in her throat. What did you want me to do? Should I call 911 and explain there's a dead naked woman in my apartment with a strawberry flavoured condom stuck in her oesophagus?

Busted!

You picked up on that didn't you? When you heard the words *strawberry* and *naked*; in your mind y'all gave a nigger an unfair trial and a fine hanging. I knew it, dammit! Y'all the same as my wife. She can swing a meat

tenderiser like Babe Ruth. Anyway, the reconstructive surgery was successful, and the blood-flow may or may not return. The Attending said time is a great healer, and we'll just have to wait. Not that any of this really matters now.

Where was I? You messed up my flow. . . Yeah, I was on the subway because my therapist had changed my appointment, short notice. Like I didn't have other shit to do that day. But when a black man's pride and joy is, you know, not in service. I guess that frees up one big chunk of time, doesn't it?

Sitting on the subway, I'd just opened my bag to look for my mp3 player, so I could chill, when this woman and me, we started talkin'. Damn, she was cute lookin'. So there I was, rummagin' and cussin'. Cussin', coz my apparatus was temporarily out of service. As any man would? You'd curse, wouldn't you? Cute lookin' woman an all, and you're sidelined. Out of the game. All I could do was look, dammit. Then I started cussin' 'bout my appointment being changed.

“What's up with you? What's your problem?” she asked.

“I'll kill that idiot therapist!” I swear, that's what I said. The woman was undercover CIA. Who knew? Now, I admit, the subway can be kinda noisy but I can't see how she thought I said '*I'm an Al Quaeda terrorist*'. At least that's what she told the coroner. Anyway, the last thing I heard was a vocal chorus of “Counter terrorist squad! Cease and desist!” Followed by several loud bangs!

So next thing I know, I'm next but one in line to get into heaven. I can tell you, the one thing they don't tell you about up here is the fog! It's foggy, damn foggy. Ain't nothin' to see but fog. Anything more than a few feet

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away, it may as well not exist. You can't see shit. I'll say I was next but one, but there was another guy just generally loitering and hanging around. Everybody seemed to be ignoring him, so I did the same. You know what they say, when in Rome. . .

Anyway, while I'm standing in line, I get to thinking. Why did they shoot me? – I did in fact cease, and I did do the desisting thing when they asked me to. After deciding there was nothing I could do about it anyway, and realising there was some kind of delay in front of me. I took comfort that my mp3 player was still in my hand. Could I get the thing to work? Hell no! Then I realised why it was broken, bullet hole clean through the middle. The display and everything still worked, though. It dawned on me! My Momma always said hip-hop would be the death of me. The player had stopped 2 seconds into track 23. My mp3 player's wire-less. The CIA got wire-less earpieces. Track 23 is NWA – F*ck the police! Who knew?

The fella in front of me is all dressed up like he's a vicar or a priest or something. At first glance I would have sworn it was Bill Clinton. But some those crackers, they all look the same to me. Anyways, as he stepped up to the plate the bouncer's stopped him. That's what was causing the delay. This bouncer was a huge brother, built like an ox.

“Sorry mate, you're not coming in; you're not on the list.” The bouncer was telling him.

“What you mean?” the vicar guy argued.

“You're not coming in; you're not on the list.”

“Of course I am,” he insisted. “The Reverend John Smith, died 10th October 2008. I must be there, check.”

“You're not coming in, you're not on the list.” The bouncer repeated himself. He remained eyes front, his

face expressionless but the tone was now more kind of assertive, like he wanted to bust somebody's ass.

Why do they always do that, I wondered? You know they just stand there, eyes front. They never actually look at you.

"Excuse me. You haven't even checked the list." The Reverend objected.

"Don't need to," replied the bouncer, pointing to a sign without looking at it.

"You can't say that!" spluttered the Reverend. "No cats, no whites, no atheists. It's illegal, and very probably unconstitutional."

"I'm sure you'll find that it is legal. It does say, *by order of the management*. And we don't have a constitution, by the way. Heaven is, and always will be - a dictatorship. Now, if you'd just like to move along sir, they'll be expecting you downstairs."

"Downstairs?" he asked.

"What's downstairs?" I interrupted.

"I can't say," said the bouncer.

"This is heaven, right?" I asked.

"Yup," replied the bouncer.

"Then I guess downstairs must be hell then," I said.

"Hell? I can't go to hell." The Reverend's face glowed red.

"Well, you ain't coming in here." The bouncer, though polite, was becoming agitated, itching to pop one on him.

Reverend John tried to push past.

The bouncer grabbed him and threw him to the ground like some kind of rag doll.

John lay on the kerb in a crumpled heap, confused, bawling like a bitch.

It was right about then I realised why they never look at you. They just stand there - eyes front. And they're always them no-neck, iron-pumpin', steroid-takin' body-building types. To turn their head to look at you would require them to have an actual neck. This guy didn't have one, neither did any bouncer that I could recollect.

"Come through mate!" The bouncer beckoned me.

"Cool," I replied. "It's good to come to a nice place where us nig. . ."

Have you ever watched the old Batman? You know where they put that 'KAPOW!' and 'BLAM!' stuff on the screen. Trust me this was - KABOOM!!! I flew clean over the Reverend guy and ended up in the street with my jaw feeling like it'd been homered.

"He doesn't like the N-word, it's forbidden up here," said the bouncer, rubbing his clenched fist.

"Who?" I replied, getting to my feet.

"Him." He raised his eyes skyward.

"Who?" I repeated through my clenched teeth.

"Him." He raised his chin and looked up this time.

"Who's him?" I was gonna get this bastard.

"Him up there!" He leaned back to raise his head a little further.

"Him up where!?" It had to work this time.

"Him up there!" He leaned back as far he could and pointed upwards. For a split-second he stood there like the leaning tower of Pisa. Eventually, he went down like one of the World Trade Centre Towers.

"Don't ever punch me again, you no-neck, over-trained, top-heavy, meat-headed bastard." I warned as I stood over him.

Thunder roared in the distance.

I stopped to think for a moment. "Bastard," I said quietly.

The thunder roared again.

"He don't particularly like that word neither," the bouncer announced, getting to his feet. "You wanna go for strike three?"

"Not really. No. I'm cool."

"I suggest you just go on inside then."

"I'm okay for a bit, I'll wait."

To tell the truth I was still a bit dazed, extremely sore and I had the mother of all migraines. Seven bullets in the head can do that to you, and the punch in the jaw didn't help none either.

"Question?" I called to the bouncer.

"What?"

"This is heaven, that's what you said, didn't you?"

"I lied, this is Iowa. Of course it's heaven. You idiot!"

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"Then why did you look up? Why do you refer God as him up there, if we are already in heaven?"

"Habit, I guess, from when I was alive, on Earth."

"Where is he then?"

"Who?"

"God."

"I dunno." He shrugged his shoulders. "Probably at home."

"Where's that?"

"The Penthouse."

"Where's the Penthouse?"

"Up. . ." He raised his head and pointed, and . . .

CRASH!!

"Gotcha again, sucker!"

"Quit it," he mumbled, as he struggled to his feet.

"Okay, I'm done with playin'. Brains beats brawn. We'll call a truce and leave at that. Just don't start nothin' that ain't goin' be nothing, meat-head . . . What in God's name is that smell?"

"What smell?"

"It smells like a hospital."

"Oh, that, that's disinfectant."

“Why? What for?”

“Maybe you ain't too bright. Everybody knows . . . cleanliness is next to godliness. Brains beats brawn – my ass.”

So, while I'm standing around I can hear some serious boom boom janga janga goin' on. The gates are rattling, vibrating and shit. Let me tell you straight! Heaven got some serious bass goin' on. I'm talkin' serious, teeth rattlin', mutha-bass up inside the place.

“What the. . .” I started.

“Don't say it.” The bouncer cut me off.

“What kind of sound system they got inside there?”

“JBL!” the bouncer announced proudly. “Twenty-four-inch sub-woofers.”

“No shit!”

“Yup, the Devil was braggin' 'bout how they got their new system coz the vice-president of the Bose Corporation died. Two weeks later, old Nick was laughing on the other side of his face. Some big-shot Jamaican club owner got shot in a drive-by. So we got this.”

“You tellin' me they got Bose downstairs and God's got kick-ass JBL up here.”

“Yup, them two are kind of competitive like that. They take turns picking spoils when people croak. Like God got Nike so the Devil picked Prada.”

“The Devil wears Prada?”

“Sure he does.”

“Thought as much. It sounds about right. I've heard that somewhere before.”

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"Who's that guy over there?" I pointed to the loiterer.

"Don't worry about him, he's not in line," replied the bouncer. Something took his attention. "Excuse me." He brushed past me and turned and shouted into the fog. "Beat it! Get out of here. You were warned."

I could hear strange noises coming out of the fog but I couldn't see anybody. "Who are you shouting at?"

"The skaters."

"Skaters?"

"Yeah, pesky roller-skaters. They've been told. They're never getting in here. Now they just hang around here and annoy me."

It was then, I noticed, as he waved angrily at the skaters, flailing his arms, the bouncer's forearms were massive. He had tattoos and huge fists. He looked silly and out of proportion.

"Ludicrous," I said, moving in for a closer look.

"What?"

"Those forearms, they're unreal." I reached over to touch one.

"Get back!" he warned. "You don't know me like that."

The Reverend stumbled towards us, sobbing. "I have to get inside there. You don't understand."

"Look mate," said the bouncer, "It's policy. God got fed up with the lot of you a few years back. One day he just said he'd had enough. I think he said, I hate cats, I'm allergic to cats. The atheists made their own bed, and white folk are just trouble makers."

"But my wife must be in there, she passed away last year." Reverend John seemed overly distraught.

"Look," I explained the sign to him. "It's just for the brothers to hang out. I guess your wife must be in that

other place, downstairs.”

“But my wife's black!” he blurted out.

“I see”, replied the bouncer before speaking into his radio.

A long minute later, a woman looking suspiciously like Julie Andrews came skipping through the gates.

“Ma'am, we got ourselves an inter,” said the bouncer, stepping aside.

“Hi.” She offered a hand whilst beaming a Julie Andrews kind of smile. “I'm Mary, God's PA. What appears to be the problem?”

“My wife's in there, I desperately need to go and speak with her,” insisted the Reverend.

“Sorry you can't, no entry, no exceptions.” She pointed to the sign. “No white folk.”

“I don't get it.”

“No white folk. What's not to get?”

“Well, can you get her to come out then? Is that possible?”

“Ah,” Mary paused, screwing up her face. “Your wife, Adrienne Smith, isn't it? She said to tell you, she can't come out because she's next up on the karaoke. But she knows about you and Matthew the altar boy, but it's okay because she forgives you.”

“I did not have sexual relations with that boy.”

Mary eyed him suspiciously over the top of her half-moon glasses before removing them, leaving them suspended from the chain around her neck. “I'm just bringing you a message, I'm not involved. If you're that way inclined, there's a counselling program downstairs. I think it's run by a Miss Cynthia Payne.”

John charged at the bouncer "But Adrienne's my wife! I've got to see her."

Like I said, the bouncer was built like a Sumo. The Reverend guy rebounded off the bouncer's chest and ended up in a heap on the floor – again.

"Ah, that's the other thing." Mary forced a quick smile and pulled a document from her clipboard. "This, I believe, is your marriage contract." She held it out in front of his face. "Can you read it for me please? The last part of section four?"

"'Til death us do part," he read slowly.

"Not wanting to stress the point, but you are in fact, dead! Both of you!" She tore the contract up in front of him before turning and skipping away.

"Excuse me, Mary, ma'am!" he called to her just as she was about to re-enter the gates.

She stopped in her tracks.

"But you're white," he added. "How did you get in there? I don't get it."

"Damnations, bugger and blast!" she cursed, paused a moment, tapping her lips with a finger as she thought. "Giss a leg up!" she called to the bouncer.

"No problem love." The bouncer obliged her and hoisted her up onto his shoulders to the sign.

"Any of you even think about looking up my skirt – and there'll be trouble." Mary pulled out a marker pen and wrote '*except genuine original bona fide women, no trannies, or skaters.*', below the words '*no whites*' on the sign.

"I agree with that rule, I hate the nasty, tinny sound of the transistor radio. It disturbs the peace," agreed the Reverend.

"I guessing you're one them vicars that don't get out into the community too much," I said.

"What?"

"The sign says, no transvestites, you know, folk that have had the removal men visit below while the construction workers were up top. Or do you need King James to translate everything for you?"

"Oh, I see." John scratched his chin. "But what's wrong with skaters?"

"They were told, dammit," cursed the bouncer.

Thunder rumbled.

"Sorry." He hung his head.

"Told what? I don't get it."

"You weren't ever a boy scout, were you?" I asked.

"No," replied the Reverend. "I was not."

"If you were. You would have known. You ain't never getting to heaven on no roller-skates."

"Why not?"

"Something about rolling past the Pearly Gates, but that doesn't make any sense, not to me, anyway."

"Complete rubbish, roller-skates mark the floor and God doesn't like it," said Mary.

"It's just not fair." John began sobbing again.

"They're only boy scouts, don't take it so hard," I told him.

"I don't give a stuff about the boy scouts. I want to see my wife."

Mary, obviously a sucker for tears, skipped over and sat next him on the kerb. "What's wrong now?" She patted him on the head as if he were a little boy.

"It's not fair, it's racist. Just to exclude people on the colour of their skin," he sobbed.

"You lot did kind of bugger it up for yourselves. All that silly warmongering, enslaving, and sending little children down the mines. What were you thinking?"

"Who's you lot?" He eyed her accusingly.

Mary looked both left and right before whispering in his ear. "White people."

"You can't just generalise like that!"

"Look John, you're alright, mate. We don't mean people like you. It's those others. But we have to draw the line somewhere." She sucked in air between her teeth. "Rules is rules."

Just then, there seemed to be some kind of an altercation outside the gates. Two more bouncers appeared and cast a man into the street.

"Can I at least go back in inside to get my other glove?" the man asked.

"Beat it," replied the first bouncer.

The man tried to walk back in through the gates but it appeared as if some kind of heavenly wind pushed him back. Try as hard as he might, every step the man took forward actually took him backwards. Eventually he gave up, walking off into the mist.

"It shouldn't matter!" he shouted back as he passed the chap who'd been hanging around since my arrival.

"What shouldn't matter?" asked the Reverend.

"If you're black or white," I explained.

The last things to disappear from view were his white socks.

"John, try to keep up," said Mary.

"I'll try," replied the Reverend.

"See, rules is rules," sighed Mary. "There you go, I actually quite liked that chap. But you see the rules are clear. You can't get gain entry in accordance with the regulations and once inside you want to be different or special. Rules is rules. No white folk! You can't gain entry as a black man and then change your mind. That's just ridiculous." She went to get up to go inside.

Reverend John pulled her back. "But you've got our women inside there."

"Not all of them," she replied. "The good and evil rules still take precedent."

"But how come our women are allowed in and we're not?"

I joined the pair of them on the kerb. I had to hear this. I closed my eyes and relaxed. "I've got a headache," I announced. "I'll just be here taking a moment. I won't say a word." I let them get on with it.

"Ah! Here's the thing," Mary started. "We've got a new hero. Forget Florence Nightingale, Joan of Arc, even the Suffragettes, they're all old news. It's all about St. Sally McBeal now, she's top bitch."

"Don't you mean, top dog?" I interrupted.

"Same difference, girl-dogs are bitches, are they not?"

"In my experience, mostly," I agreed.

"Where was I? Yes, top bitch. She even kicked Lady Di off the top spot. Took my boss to arbitration, kicked his butt!"

"Really?" said the Rev in a shrill voice.

"Big time!"

"Can that be done?"

"Obviously! Since the bit. . . oops, woman, did in fact, do it . . . Ahem! Sorry about that, but I was a saint when a sainthood actually meant something. Now, Mr Bennetton approves anything, he just doles them out like choccy biscuits."

"Who's Mr Bennetton?"

"God, stupid!"

"Oh, that's his name. I never knew that. Anyway, you haven't answered my question."

"Ah well! Yes! 29th February 2000 was a massive day in court! Nobody thought Sally had a chance."

"2000 wasn't a leap year, there was no February 29th."

"See, that's the thing, it was. We just didn't tell you lot. Like there was anybody still around from the year 1000 to know what actually happened during millennium festivities. We could have gotten away with blue murder. We shut it all down, down there, earth. Up here in heaven, business as usual."

"I see."

"Where was I? Yes, trial. God didn't even bother to turn up! He mumbled about omnipresence or something, and could I email him the transcript if anything interesting happened. I wasn't really listening."

"God's got email?" asked the Reverend.

"Of course he has. It's far better than all that praying rubbish. And there have been certain other issues."

"I don't get it."

"You didn't here it from me . . ." Mary looked left then right, and moved closer to us. "Mary Magdalene sinned, badly. Jesus asked her to kneel before him. Well, you know what Mags is like. She got totally the wrong idea about penance. She removed her chewing gum, and went for it. Of course Mags is a girl of experience, she knew the exact moment when to ask if she was forgiven. Jesus agreed to forgive her everything, past, present, and

future. Judas, leaked the story, and now priests think it's a funny game to play with the choir boys. So, God decided, no more kneeling and praying – it's all about email now."

"Someone should have told this to Matthew the alter boy, the blood of Christ doesn't taste salty" I said.

The Reverend looked away, red and embarrassed. He elected to change the subject. "How on earth do you email God?"

The Virgin Mary scowled at John. "Are you a complete imbecile? god@heaven.com – stupid! It all comes into my Blackberry and I'm supposed to forward anything interesting but I don't know how to. So whenever anybody prays, the auto-responder says God's in a meeting."

"That's just immoral, or something, surely?"

"Technically, their prayers are answered, so we're not in breach of our service level agreement."

"I think, that's disgusting."

"I guess we will sort it out one day. Now stop interrupting me. Where was I, again?"

"Omnipresence." I reminded her.

Yes, well. My boy, Jesus, conducted the defence." She leaned to John and whispered in his ear again. "I smelled alcohol on his breath. It's that water into wine thing. Better than duty free. Especially now he's mastered how to make the fortified stuff. That stuff's got some kick. One night Mags . . ."

"What actually happened with the appeal?" The Reverend's impatience was showing.

"Right, Ah, Well. St. McBeal claimed, all the crap that you lot did to cheese God off was nothing to do with us women. We were looking after the kids and cooking at the time. Men wouldn't let us join the army, we weren't allowed to war. The buggers wouldn't even let us vote! More importantly, we weren't allowed into golf clubs or to go fishing."

“What do golf and fishing have to do with it?”

“I’ll come to that. Don’t make me lose my thread. Where was I? Kids, cooking, army, yes. Right! Jesus argued, citing Adam versus Eve, the date escapes me. God ruled in favour of Adam. In summary he said that the woman’s place was in the home and the man was to be the provider. For the purposes of wrath, vengeance and law. The family were both individually and collectively liable. All this was covered by previous legislation contained within *‘the sins of the father.’*”

“I can see that,” agreed the Reverend.

“That’s what *we* thought; we believed Sally, as she was known then, had been well and truly scuppered. But I must show the girl respect. You know, big her up, and all that. She set Jesus up and slam dunked the mother.”

“He dunked you? I thought you were his mother?”

“I am his mother. Where were we?”

“How did she win the case?”

“Oh, yes, right. God wasn’t in charge. Moses, his awesomeness, was sitting. Moses is a stickler for the law. The man’s got no flexibility. To him, it’s all black and white, no grey areas. It’s like the laws are etched in stone.”

“So?”

“Sally had bailiffs bring in box upon box filled with birth certificates. We’re talking truckloads! If we had trucks up here, but we don’t.”

“Shit-loads?” I offered.

“Yes, that’ll do. - Sh. . . What he said.”

She kicked me.

“Anyway, Sally demanded they all be put into evidence.”

"Why?" asked John.

"They were the birth certificates of all children fathered during alleged fishing trips and rounds of golf."

"Jesus!"

"What are you insinuating?" Objected Mary "Joseph never played golf. And. . ."

"Chill! Baby." I interrupted. "He only used Jesus as an expression."

"You may well say that! But I am getting fed up to the back teeth with snide remarks about my immaculate conception. Anyway," she continued. "Sally stitched him up, totally. Once in evidence, the records are in the public domain."

"So?"

"What would happen if people knew Prince Charles had no right to the throne, or Michael Douglas is Catherine Zeta wotshername's father *and* her husband? Too risky! Sally quoted commandments seven and ten. Moses had to rule, appeal upheld."

"Six and ten," mumbled John.

"Oh right, forgot you were a Catholic. Anyway, they had to let all the women back into heaven. Well, not all of them. Boudeccia, Winnie Mandela, Sarah Palin and a couple of others didn't make it."

"What's wrong with Sarah Palin?" The Reverend nudged me. It was a good thing, too, I was dropping off to sleep.

"I'm not the gossipy type. All I can tell you is, Matthew Hopkins testimony sunk her good and proper. Besides, she's a ginger, she deserved it."

"Sarah Palin's not ginger!" I objected.

"Palin's a fire-crotch witch!" said Mary. "That's why she's so keen on having a Hollywood image."

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"Hollywood image?" questioned the Reverend. "She's not an actress, she's a politician,"

To save him embarrassment, I whispered the details into his ear.

"Do you understand now?"

"Are you trying to say, she's actually bald?" he spat.

"Something like that. You don't get out much, do you?"

"I refuse to accept that. She's from Alaska, it's cold. Sorry, you've totally lost me. What's a bikini got to do with anything?"

"I'm a Brazilian girl myself, but who cares!" Mary wore a grin of satisfaction on her face. She started to dance. "Do you hear the funky music and noise inside?"

(Whoomp! There it is! Booms in the background).

"The trial was over eight years ago and they're still partying now." She pirouetted.

"Sod 'em!" cursed the reverend.

"Yeah right, Sodom and Gomorrah. A bit before my time, but I heard they were some wicked raves." Mary continued to boogie. "You lot have rebuilt them since. What do you call them now? Ah! That's it, Vegas and Hollywood." She started to wind her hips.

I'll tell you I was stunned! For a so called 'virgin' - that woman *knew* how to bump and grind. I was getting kind of horny just watching, but still - no signs of life down below. "You go, girlfriend!" I cheered her on. "Where d'you learn your wiggle from? You sure know how to shake that thang!"

I don't know what language you speak, English or American, that fanny was gyратin' and a wigglin' on both sides of the Atlantic.

"Ha! This is heaven. Look around, it's full of black people. There's any number of these guys know how to rig the cable so we can get MTV Base for free." She rolled her eyes upward and put a finger to her lips. "Shh! He thinks it's post-modernist gospel music."

"I didn't know the Virgin Mary was Brazilian," John said to me.

I informed him he'd wasted the best part of his life.

"How would you have known, anyway?" Mary laughed and lit a cigarette. "It's a DIY job. The only people who know, are me and my gynaecologist. I'm going to smoke this and then I'm going back inside."

"Mary! Mother of Jesus!" the Reverend cried.

"Yes." Mary turned her head.

"What are you doing?"

"What?" She looked at her cigarette. "Not you as well? I'm the one stuck being a virgin. Can't I have at least one vice?" Mary stood up, arms folded surveying the fog.

John remained on the kerb, his knees pulled into his chest. "I can't believe God barred white people."

"He did, and you could see it coming. Be warned. Even now, Mr Bennetton is not appeased. He still speaks of wrath, vengeance, and all that fire and brimstone stuff."

"Why? I've been a good servant to him."

"The thing is. . ." She peered at John over her half-moon glasses again. "The coos, he took the first one personally, he took it very hard."

“Coos? What coos?”

“In the eighties, you lot tried to replace him.”

“We did no such thing.”

“Did you or did you not, try to use Charlton Heston as his body double for sole purpose of convincing people Mr Bennetton was a white man?”

“No, well maybe. I can see how it may have looked that way but ask him to look at the benefits.”

“What benefits?” She gave him another over-the-glasses look.

“Well, until I was twelve. I actually believed God *was* Charlton Heston. My mum would ogle the TV every time he appeared. Actually, come to think of it. That's why she made me enter my profession. I suppose Charlton gave me my calling.”

Thunder roared in the distance.

“Then you should know the consequences of worshipping false idols,” snapped Mary.

“But isn't he all about forgiveness?”

“Yes, but he says he has a full belly but an empty bladder. I quote 'Mary, I have no more urine for them to extract'.”

“I see.” The Reverend appeared concerned.

“And he knows about the latest challenge to his title. The other one who claims he is a god and has omnipresence.”

“What? Who are you talking about? “

"That William bloody Gates character. Mr Bennetton will send him crashing, mark my words." She waved a finger.

The Reverend swallowed hard. "So it's Armageddon then?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. You people just got him mad. Now he sees things that just ain't there." She exhaled cigarette smoke, blowing rings whilst thinking. "The Lever brothers, Proctor and Gamble. He cast a plague on their families for all eternity."

"Plague? Why?" Not for the first time the Reverend wrinkled his face in confusion.

"Yes, you know, bubonic plague, AIDS, cancer, things like that for the men. The women were cursed with dandruff, split ends, and cellulite."

"Why? What did they do?"

"That washing powder slogan. He took it totally the wrong way."

"What slogan?"

"If the whites are right, the rest is too. He didn't like its implications."

The Reverend sat speechless.

"I don't know who he despises more," Mary continued. "White people or kids. Maybe he really hates white kids. That must be it."

"I can't believe that. What about; suffer the little children to come unto me?"

"That'd be the Kings James translation, bad punctuation, wrong context. He meant - the little buggers will suffer if they come near him."

"Rubbish!" retorted John.

"Think about it! How many biological children does God have?"

"Just the one."

"Exactly, and that was only because I got creative with a turkey baster. I wanted Jerusalem housing project to re-house me. What? Would you want me to live in a stable all of my life?"

Reverend Smith had no answer. A period of silence ensued.

"Right!" Mary announced eventually. "I'm going back inside." She threw her cigarette butt into the fog. "You'd better get off downstairs. When these bouncers get annoyed they can become quite unpleasant. It's that way." She pointed into the fog.

"This isn't right," the Reverend John spoke out. "God created all men equal!"

"Yeah right!" I scoffed, looking him up and down. "You white boys still believe that one, dream on." I put my arm around his shoulder. "Your faith can't help you. Us brothers got some huge, family pack sized. . . Why do you think your wife ain't coming out? She's in *heaven* right now, butt nekkid, bent over something, singing like an angel, trust me on that. To a woman, heaven, is a man sized dick." I ducked, but no thunder came.

"I wouldn't know." Mary grinned and cheekily flicked her eyebrows. "I'm a virgin remember." She winked at me before turning toward the gates.

I remarked how perfect her eyebrows were.

"In my household, plucking is the closest I get to any real enjoyment at night," she replied.

"What?" I smirked. "Do you pluck away screaming 'hurt me, hurt me'?"

"You've no respect." John pointed a stern finger at me. "What you are insinuating is paramount to blasphemy."

Mary simply laughed and rolled her eyes. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Shocking," said the Reverend.

Mary swung around. "And you Chris, you need to keep your head down and stay out of trouble. There's a few people got it in for you."

I was amazed she actually knew my name. "Why?"

"Everybody hates Chris! Remember. Try to keep up!"

The Reverend laughed at me.

"Say. . . John?" I said. "Exactly what kind of Reverend guy are you?"

"I am a Catholic. Why?"

"You're not a Baptist, then?"

"No, I'm a Catholic."

"You should have been a Baptist?"

"Why?"

"John the Catholic – it doesn't have that X-Factor, star quality ring to it, does it?"

Two men appeared at the gates. "Mary! Can you pop in for a second," one shouted.

"Pop in?" she echoed, before slapping the man around the face. "You promised not to bring that up! Ever! I was young. I needed the work."

"Can you pop in inside, they need you. That's all I was trying to say. It's our secret, I promise."

"Oh! Bugger it! Sorry." Her face reddened before she skipped away.

Arbitration

The new guy called to John Smith. "Woah! Reverend Smith. Hold up, one sec," he shouted from the gate, before turning to his associate. "Mr Moses, sir, we'll talk about this later."

The man he called Mr Moses returned inside and the first man joined us.

I wasn't sure if I was in Heaven, Hollywood or suffering from shock. Okay, so it was foggy, maybe I couldn't see too good, but the man he called Mr Moses, looked and sounded like Morgan Freeman. The guy that came out was a dead ringer for Bruce Willis.

"Did you just come out of there?" John Smith asked.

"Sure I did."

"But you're white."

"I knew that."

"And you're a man?"

"One-hundred percent red-blooded American!" The man handed John his card.

The Reverend studied the card briefly. "Okay Mr Winkle. If you're a white man, how did you get into heaven?"

"Oh right, it's a really long story, but the bullet points. God decided to legislate for this whole white exclusion thing during the American Civil war. He was getting ticked off about us wiping out the Native American Indians then enslaving and relocating half the Africans on the west coast."

"Meaning?"

"Even God isn't above due process. If he wants to do make the Caucasian Exclusion bill, stick, he has to go through consultancy and serve mandatory notices, or he risks being embarrassed when it goes in front of the ARB.

Or if they launch one of their random inquiries.”

“What's the ARB?” I asked.

“Apolistic Review Board.” The way he said it seemed like it was something I was supposed to know about.

“God didn't expect the ARB to get involved. Nobody expects the ARB. Their main weapon is surprise.”

“And?” The Reverend looked eager for Winkle to continue.

“I was asleep for the global serving of notices. Apparently it manifested itself as a total eclipse. I was out for the count. Forty-winks kind of thing. Who knew? I was therefore, exempt.” Winkle beamed.

“I don't understand this!” John scratched his head.

“It's not important right now. Shall I tell you what is?”

“What is?”

“Tabernacle, good word, remember that.”

“Who are you again?”

“R.V. Winkle, attorney-at-law. It says it right there on the card.”

“OUT!!!” We were interrupted by a bouncer throwing a white man into the street.

“But. . .”

“OUT!” the bouncer repeated.

“I was good, dammit.” The man picked himself up, dusted himself off, and retrieved what appeared to be a tennis racquet.

“OUT!” The bouncer pointed into the fog.

“You cannot be serious!” The man screamed, hurled his racquet into the fog, and stormed off into the

distance.

“Crazy cracker,” I mumbled.

“Where were we?” asked John-the-Catholic.

“Tabernacle,” said Winkle.

“Tabernacle?”

“Yes, Tabernacle. It means, tent.”

“I knew that,” said John.

“Right.” I agreed.

“And there's the 18-30 stuff,” enthused Winkle.

“18-30 is a holiday company,” John said, shaking his head. “They do those awful orgy type holiday things. Surely you mean 12-30. Where was Jesus between the ages 12 and 30?”

“I remember those holidays,” I reminisced fondly. “We used to call it love-fest”

“Love-fest?” echoed the Reverend. “I've never heard that one before.”

“Reverend, we're in heaven, I feel kind of uncomfortable using certain cuss words. Keep up, dammit.”

Thunder cracked in the distance.

“Oops, sorry.” I held my hand up to apologise.

“Whatever! Trust me; the 18 to 30 love fest stuff is just as relevant. Turns out, young master J was out gallivanting with his cousin Nick.”

"Nick?"

"Yeah, Nick. Nick was a bit of a devil, a bad boy, and an all round bad influence."

"Your point being?"

"Gallivanting, 18-30, tent. Are you getting this?"

"No."

"Okay son." Mr Winkle pulled out a birth certificate. "After Sally won the appeal. Judas found this and sold me a copy."

"I don't get it?" The Reverend scratched his head.

"There was a report of an incident in a tent with a young woman while they were out gallivanting."

"Mr Winkle. What exactly are you saying?"

"I'm saying, the man can't send his own relations downstairs, it's unethical."

"Are you saying, I'm related to God?" asked John.

"Possibly."

"So what does this mean?"

"It means, son, we're going to a ball game! Arbitration here we come!"

"Excuse me Mr Winkle," I called. "Do you know who he is?" I pointed over to the loiterer. "Why is he just standing around? Is he a tramp?"

"Tramp? . . . Oh, you mean like a pan-handler. No, we don't have them up here."

"Well, who is he then?"

"Erm, he's like a lost soul."

"What do you mean?"

“Are you English, dammit?”

Thunder rolled in the background.

“Why do you need everything explained to you? Why can't you be a proper American. Just say, I don't get it, and move on.”

“Doesn't he need an exorcist or something?” asked John.

“No, he doesn't. Okay, he's been here fifteen years. He got hit by a DHL truck; he and the driver were killed instantly.”

“Where's the driver? What happened to him?”

“He's inside,” replied Winkle.

“What about him? What will happen?” asked the Reverend, pointing.

“There's no paperwork, nobody up here will sign for him. He says it doesn't matter. He was being delivered from evil, and DHL were supposed to get him here by noon the next day. He's got a point, if nobody here will sign for him, they're supposed to send him back. Anyway, forget him. We're all going to arbitration.”

“Yeah! And you're going down!” a voice boomed behind them.

I couldn't believe my eyes. “Is that Mr T?” I asked the bouncer.

The bouncer shrugged his shoulders.

“No it's Mr J!” said Winkle. “Jesus, how you doing? How's the family?” Winkle shook his hand. “Mr J, meet The Reverend John Smith, aka, John-the-Catholic.”

“I heard what you been sayin' and this fool ain't no kin to me. He's going down.” Jesus ignored the

Reverend's outstretched hand.

The woman Jesus was with was a blonde, and she was stunning. Hot! Sexy as hell, and the woman had melons like - melons.

"Mary, my dear, how are you?" Winkle, I'm sure, intended to kiss her hand but Jesus stepped between them.

"Mags baby, go back inside. I don't want you hanging round here with these no good white boys."

Mary Magdalene walked back through the gates, her switch over emphasised.

Winkle looked on. "There's just something about that woman."

"Who?" asked John.

"Mary," he replied. "There's something about Mary, try to keep up!"

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Jesus sure is sensitive about his woman," said Winkle. "Mr J's turned kind of grumpy. Kids don't like him no more since he sent Santa Claus down."

"He did what!" gasped the Reverend.

"Yup! Sent Santa downstairs for all eternity."

"No way!"

"The man disrespected my woman at my own birthday party," growled Jesus. "He does it every year! He shouldn't be saying that stuff. I warned him but he said it three times." Jesus wrapped his fur coat a little tighter.

Winkle laughed.

John Smith just looked bemused.

"Him and that ugly, green, sweet corn eating mother-man. They can just rot in Hell!" Jesus puffed.

"Don't you mean, burn in Hell?" I asked.

"Shuddup, fool!" Jesus cursed me.

"I'm not quite following?" John frowned in confusion.

"Santa Claus, Green Giant, ho-ho-ho," I whispered into the Reverend's ear. "Try to keep up."

He let out a titter of a laugh.

"And as for you!" Jesus pointed a threatening finger at the Reverend. "You going down! I'm taking you all down, one time. Even you!" He pointed at me.

"Why me?"

"Coz every body hates Chris!" Jesus, Winkle and the bouncer all said in unison. I even think the Reverend John Smith joined in.

"We'll see Mr J, you get your people. We're talking about the Vatican's favourite son here. We'll get our people. See who's laughing on Judgement day." Winkle replied smugly.

I noticed the bouncer turn away another white guy. "There's no Sarah Conner here."

"I'll be back," the guy said, and strode off into the fog.

"Can't we get that St McBeal woman on our team?" asked the Reverend.

"Doubt it," sighed Winkle. "She's all loved up with Tiger Woods,"

"Tiger Woods? How did he get up here?" I asked.

"Last week, Phil Mickleson sliced a three wood. Damn that lump on Tiger's head looked nasty! Personally, I'm with the conspiracy theorists on that one. How else were they gonna get him off the top spot?"

"So it's a definite no on the St. McBeal issue?" I could tell, John wanted to get back to the point.

"You lot don't know do you?" Jesus laughed.

"Know what?" Winkle said nervously.

"We want to settle this one time. My Dad's summoned the Pope, he's now your co-defendant." Jesus' laughter increased to a roar.

"That's a good thing, right?" asked John. "The pope would be good backup, right?"

"Not really." Winkle winced. "We don't really have visitors up here. You're here to stay, or you get transferred downstairs. It's not like you can get a return ticket. This is heaven for Christ's sake, it ain't no holiday resort."

"Meaning?" questioned John.

Jesus looked at his watch and laughed. "In seventeen minutes the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel's coming down."

"Is Michelangelo up or down?" I inquired.

"Down, why?" Jesus snapped.

"That ceiling took him . . . like, forever. When he finds out, he's gonna freak."

For some reason, the Reverend laughed. I don't know if Jesus thought John was laughing at him, but Jesus just went crazy. It was like he was possessed.

The Lord Jesus launched an attack on the Reverend. "Shuddup fool! You crazy fool!" He shouted in a deep gruff voice.

The Reverend jumped up to defend himself.

Arbitration

A scuffle broke out.

Winkle grabbed the Reverend and that's when, pardon the expression. - All hell broke loose.

"Mr J, there's no need to fly off the handle." Winkle tried to calm him.

"Fly!" screamed Jesus. "I ain't flying nowhere. You ain't getting me on no god-damned plane!"

Thunder rumbled overhead.

"You crazy fool!" He became extremely animated, pointing and gesticulating at the Reverend.

The bouncer ran over and restrained him.

"Come on bring it! Fool!" Jesus continued, struggling to break free.

The Reverend gave Jesus a cold hard stare. I heard some bells ring and a fanfare started. Why were they playing the theme from Rocky?

Heaven's doors opened. The people flooded out.

John-the-Catholic, showed no fear.

"Don't even think about it," warned Winkle, pulling John back. "This guy is a wrecking machine. He'll kill you, I'll tell ya!"

More bouncers came running out. "Come on people, make a hole!" they shouted, wrestling people out of the way.

"Fool! Why you ducking me, huh?" Jesus was livid. Three bouncers were trying to restrain him.

People continued spilling out of heaven to see what all raucous was about. In the chaos, nobody noticed the loitering guy sneak inside.

"You're going down!" screamed Jesus, with bouncers holding him back.

A skater roared past.

The Reverend spotted his wife by the gate. He reached out to her. "Adrienne!" he called.

"You're going down! Fool!" boomed Jesus.

"Adrienne!" the Reverend cried.

"Shut up you crazy fool!"

"Adrienne!" He screamed one last time as the bouncer ushered her back inside.

"You're going down. You crazy fool!"

"I ain't going down."

ARBITRATION - ACT II

"Wow! This is awesome." I stood, mouth open, looking around the massive outdoor arena. Thousands of people all milled around. The atmosphere buzzed with anticipation. It was still foggy but it wasn't as foggy as it had been. I could make out the cheerleaders and the marching bands. All the white men wore bright orange boiler suits and were chained together at the wrists and ankles.

"Why are they all chained up like that?" I asked.

"They're from downstairs. They've been bussed in. In the event the good Reverend here wins his case, they get to appeal," said Winkle.

"What is this place?" asked The Reverend.

"Heavenly Square Gardens. Too many people for the courthouse. Hearing had to be out here."

"There's no mention of this place in the bible." Smith looked around seemingly in awe.

"To be honest, it's a recent acquisition. God bought it from Kevin."

"Kevin? Who's Kevin?"

"Yes, Kevin. Used to live on a boat, did a bit of security work, bodyguard, I think - that Kevin. Jesus sold this place to Kevin, Kevin threatened to sue. Mary convinced God to buy it back, compulsory purchase deal. Do you understand?"

"Er, no," the Reverend replied.

"Okay." Winkle took a deep breath.

"Jesus conned Kevin, he visited him in a dream and advised him to buy the land."

"Why?"

"Nobody knows." Winkle sighed heavily. "Okay, Joe downstairs accused somebody of stealing his shoes. Kevin was looking into it, but didn't follow it through after John got shot."

"Why did John get shot?"

"Beats me."

"Well, who shot him?"

"Nobody's saying. Anyway, Joe gets Jesus involved in a revenge scheme."

"How?"

"Kevin buys the land and he builds this big assed baseball field, and he's waiting around every day and Joe's laughing at him?"

"Joe without the shoes?" I sought confirmation.

"Right, that'd be him."

"Heaven and hell have real estate for sale?" I asked.

"Sort of." Winkle puffed, then sighed. "God owns it all. Heaven is freehold, hell is leasehold."

"So the Devil, hell and all that stuff is just temporary?"

"What you mean, *the* Devil. Only God has eternal life. There's no such thing as *the* Devil, only the current reigning devil."

"I don't get it."

"The devil thing is a franchise, dominated by a dynasty."

"Nope, still not working for me."

"Think of it like those Bush people, George, George W. . ."

"The moment you said Bush, I totally got it."

"Anyway, Joe and Kevin are fighting on the mound. I mean they're proper going at it. Kevin's getting mad saying. I built it, why didn't they come? Joe's not interested, he just wants his shoes back. Kevin thinks Joe's put the word out and the players are boycotting the place because they think Kevin stole his shoes. The two of them are out there for three days kicking lumps out of each other. Jesus is standing there laughing the whole time coz he's making cash, this thing's going out on pay per view."

"Did Kevin have the shoes?"

"No, Joe's shoes are in Cooperstown where he left them."

"Did Joe organise a boycott?"

"No, not to my knowledge."

"So, why didn't they come then?"

"Look around you." Winkle laughed. "This is heaven. It's always foggy. Who's wants to play baseball in this god-damned, pea soup . . ."

A loud crack of thunder frightened everybody. Lightning lit up the arena.

Winkle ducked. "Oops, I think he's really mad!"

"Wasn't that because you said god-dammed?" I offered.

More thunder rumbled.

"That too," said Winkle.

"Why's he so mad?" asked the Reverend.

"It's getting kind of ugly." Winkle stepped closer. "The Devil got an injunction."

"Against?"

"Against God killing the Pope."

"Okay."

"You see the Devil's not actually on our side. He doesn't want no more do-gooders hanging out down there."

"Right."

"But I spoke to Sally."

"Sally McBeal? I thought you said she couldn't be on our team."

"Technically, . . . well look, she can do back office stuff. She used to date a doctor."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"You see, the Pope's not dead, he's in a coma. What we're gonna do is kill him off temporarily."

"Temporarily?"

"Yeah, bring him up here for nine minutes testimony, then after, we shock him with the jumper cables – bring him back to life."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"Maybe, perhaps a little brain damage. But I just see it as shock therapy. It worked on that John Paul guy,

made him seem lucid for a couple extra years. They do it all the time, how do you think John McCain keeps going?"

"I won't have you talk about the man that way." The Reverend objected.

"McCain or the Pope?" asked Winkle.

"The Pope, stupid!" said the Rev.

"Get over yourself. He's not the Pope anymore, he's dead. What you going to do about it anyway? You're dead too. You think I don't know about you Catholics and your little white lies. John Paul's mad with you lot. He hates you for what you did, he says he's happy to be downstairs."

"What are you talking about?" said Rev Smith.

"He said you left him stinking out the Vatican for a whole day, and it was hot! He's down there swearing and cursing with the worst of them."

"You're mad. What are you talking about?"

"Tell me. When did he die?"

"Erm, 2nd April 2005, Why?"

"Exactly!"

"Exactly what?"

"If you'd announced to the world on April fool's day that the Pope was dead. Who'd believe you? So you left it an extra day." Winkle clutched his belly, hysterical with laughter.

The Reverend saw red. He grabbed a baseball bat from the dug-out and swung at Winkle with all his might. Winkle ducked.

The bat hit a passing cheerleader, smashing her skull. Her brains spilled out.

"Oh my God!" cried the Reverend. "What have I done?"

"Ah, don't worry about it," mused Winkle, looking down at the stricken girl, the whole side of her head caved in.

"Walk it off!" He tried to pull her to her feet but she simply collapsed into a heap. "Cheerleaders are tough, she'll get over it. - St John, go away! Shoo. We don't need you. Take the stretcher away. Get out of here. She's fine, she'll bounce back, trust me on that."

Mary, cigarette in hand, skipped up to the trio. "You ain't telling them that Joe and Kevin Story are you?"

Personally, I wasn't amused. Winkle was boring me.

The Reverend looked pretty stone faced, too.

"You know what the problem is?" Mary cursed. "The story's rubbish!"

"Don't you have somewhere to go?" snarled Winkle.

"Not yet."

"Get yourself some 'pop' corn maybe?"

"What?"

"Pop in' to check on your son while he's preparing?"

"Shut it! You stupid bugger!"

"Guys." He turned to us, giggling. "Mary's going to 'pop in' to see the judge for a moment."

Mary angrily pulled him aside. "You open your mouth; I'm taking you down with me."

"I'm R.V. Winkle, attorney-at-law. I'll kick your virgin butt."

"Yeah, I'll rip you apart!" she retorted. "Yeah I said - rip!"

"You want some?"

"Yeah. I want some, Dick, bring it. Let's get it out in the open, see what you got. If I'm going down, you're gonna need something big."

"I thought she was a virgin?" John whispered.

"She is, Reverend. Keep up! Dammit!" I snapped, straining my ears to listen.

Thunder again.

Winkle, immediately shrivelled to nothing.

"Dick, don't fu -, mess with me I'm a virgin." Mary scowled. "If you try that pop stuff again. I swear I'll tell 'em."

"Who's Dick?" asked the Reverend.

"He is," I replied.

"I should never have let you near me," said Mary.

"Are you sure she's a virgin?" asked John.

"John, are you losing your faith?" I asked.

"Shut it. You transvestite gay lesbian," continued Mary.

"Wait, I remember some slang from the Sunday school kids. Did she just call him a dyke?" asked The Rev.

"Sort of."

"Oh, I get it now, R. Van Winkle. I can tell from his surname, he's Dutch, right?"

"Maybe his grandparents were, I'm not too sure." I tried to fob him off with the first answer I could think of.

"So, she's a dyke too, and he stuck his finger. . ."

“Reverend!! Let's go back to the shoe story. . . No, forget the whole thing. No shoes, no dykes, let's just move on.”

“Okay, so what's the plan of attack then?” he asked.

“Well first you, Chris.” Winkle pointed to me. “You're sitting with us.”

“Why?”

“We don't want this turning into a black, white thing, do we?”

“Right, so I'm the token black man?”

“It's a hard job, and it's not like either of us two can do it, is it?”

“True,” I agreed.

“What's our strategy then?” the Reverend enthused, rubbing his hands together.

“I got a few tricks up my sleeve for Mr J, trust me.” He pulled an envelope from his inside pocket.

“Order!” shouted the Bailiff. “Heavenly court is now in session. His awesomeness Judge Moses presiding!”

“This is an informal hearing without a jury; after which I will rule,” The judge started.

Thunder cracked in the background.

“I didn't mean rule, rule, I meant - I'd rule on the case,” he quickly added, cringing. “Gentlemen, please approach the bench,” he addressed Jesus and Winkle, summoning them forward. “Gentlemen, I want you to keep it

clean. No name calling, no cursing, no gouging, no spitting. Got it?" He glanced at Jesus. "And please, Mr Jesus H. Christ, let's keep people's mothers out of this. Mr R.V. Winkle."

"Yeah."

"Fall asleep in my courtroom, and I will hold you in contempt. Do I make that clear?"

Both men nodded their agreement.

Moses banged his gavel. "Can I get a Amen!"

"Amen," the crowd responded

The band played the US national anthem.

"We're not in America!" I objected.

"Yeah, sorry about that, but it's the only tune the cheerleader's know a routine to." Moses shrugged.

"Stop that!" Jesus rushed over to the Hispanic section of the crowd where they were singing passionately with their eyes squeezed tightly shut. "Judge! Can you please instruct these people to open their eyes? This is an American anthem, there is no blind man named Jose."

"It is so ordered. You people, open your eyes." Moses banged his gavel.

"Thank you, your awesomeness," said Jesus.

"What was all that about?" asked Reverend Smith.

"They think the words are, 'Jose can you see'. Try to keep up!" I explained.

The Reverend scratched his head. "I don't get it."

"I'd like to cut to the chase and call Cousin Nick to the stand." Winkle started.

"Objection!" Jesus leapt into action.

"Sustained," agreed Moses. "Nick is not permitted in this place. He was given a lifetime ban."

"I kind of knew you'd say that." Winkle smiled and pointed a finger. "That's why I have his sworn testimony, right here." He waved the envelope.

"That's inadmissible," objected Jesus. "We'd like full disclosure before that's considered evidence."

"That's okay, he didn't say much, he pleaded the 5th."

"I think we've established you can't plead the 5th in heaven."

"Nick's not in heaven!" Winkle thrust the envelope into Jesus' face. "Pay particular attention to the stamp. You gotta love the US postal service. They have the 5th, that takes precedence."

"Objection."

"Overruled. I'll allow it."

Winkle opened up the envelope and began to read. "You putrid excrements of. . .oops." He began scanning further into the statement. "Moaned like a. . .er no. . . da da da. . . All teeth and enthusiasm. . . da da . . .ah. Ha! There you go, found it," he announced. "'Jesus, I'm not on the pill.' It says it right there."

"That's not evidence!" Jesus laughed. "Lot's of women say that."

"Really, is that so? You bastard." Mary Magdalene cursed and ran crying from the gallery.

The prisoners in orange roared with laughter.

"Nothing further." Winkle returned Nick's statement to his pocket. "Next, I'd like to call Jesus."

"You can't be calling me, fool!" snapped Mr J.

"I thought I just did!" retorted Winkle.

The gallery laughed.

"You can't be calling Jesus!" said the clerk.

"Everybody else does!" Winkle was on top form.

"True," I agreed. "My granny be calling Jesus all the time. So does Eddie's Aunt Bunny, Lord, Jesus, Lord help me. I'm falling down the steps."

A ripple of agreement could be heard in the crowd.

"Yeah, black people be callin' Jesus all the time," someone shouted.

"Goonnigoogoo!" added another.

"I'm gonna allow it," said the judge.

Mary Magdalene returned. "I've got some ice-cream."

Jesus picked up the bible. "Daddy, you the man, I swear!"

"Okay." Winkle strutted around the court. "Mr J. Let's go back to the 'Jesus I'm not on the pill', part. You remember your testimony? They say that all the time, do they?"

"Yeah, people say that, it's a figure of speech."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"But they don't actually say it to you?"

"Never!" He flashed his teeth at Mags. "My baby takes her birth control regular."

"I believe you. Do you know why?"

"Why's that?"

"Cos you don't know shit about women!"

"What you trying to say? Fool!" Jesus stood up, fuming!

"Your momma's a virgin, right?"

"Damn right!"

Thunder rumbled.

"But she's your momma?"

"Yup!"

"Shit, if he carries on with this I'm busted," muttered Mary.

"You and me both!" Mags agreed.

"And you pay your woman, here." He pointed a finger at Mags, "to have sex with you, right?" continued Winkle.

"No!"

"But she is a ho?"

"What you tryin' to say, fool! You got a big mouth son. Why don't you. . ."

"Order! Order!" Moses banged his gavel so much the Hispanics joined in, blowing whistles and dancing.

The Caribbeans started to tap out a rhythm on the seats.

"Ole ole, ole ole. How ya feelin', hot hot hot! . . ."

The prisoners in the orange boiler suits joined in, singing and rattling their chains. The stricken cheerleader rose to her feet and tried to start dancing. She was a little unsteady, and bounced off a few people but her head

seemed to be healing nicely.

“There it is,” I said. “It was sounding real good 'til them white prisoners started singing. That's why your churches are empty. White folk shouldn't sing in groups. It just sounds ugly! Unless of course they're fat. Fat whities can sing. Them two-tonne tenors are good. And the fat lady, whoever she is? I bet she can sing. Although I ain't never seen her on X-factor or anything. . .”

“ORDER!!” screamed Moses at the top of his lungs. “I WANT SOME GOD-DAMNED, MOTHER. . .”

A horrendous crack of thunder boomed, accompanied by a vicious flash of lighting.

Everybody calmed down.

In the silence, I heard my knees knocking.

The case continued.

“Jesus.” Winkle eyed him intently. “What exactly is sex?”

“Lord have mercy, we are so busted,” gasped Mags.

“Bugger!” exclaimed Mary. “I never wanted him to find out, not like this.”

“Well,” started Jesus. “You have to throw the dice and. . .”

“Objection!” Mary, Mags and I bawled in unison.

“What are you doing? Why are you objecting?” Winkle screamed at me.

“Sorry, but I ain't seeing a brother going out like that.”

"Counsel needs counsel," suggested Mary.

"Sustained," agreed Moses.

"Withdrawn." Winkle smiled and winked at the two Marys before resuming his cross-examination. "Jesus, in your own words. What exactly is an immaculate conception?"

"Objection." Mary brought the waterworks out as a last resort.

Moses, unimpressed, waved her away.

"Proper busted, rumbled, sunk," sighed Mags.

"The witness is directed to answer the question," boomed Moses.

Jesus placed one hand at an angle to the other. "It's when the dice land like this."

The recovered cheerleader fainted again.

Gasps of amazement rippled through the arena.

"Mr J, I put it to you that you don't know an awful lot about women." Winkle pointed a finger.

The entire arena gasped again.

"Your mother was a virgin and you spent your entire life running around with twelve men, please. It's obvious to me, I think you're a closet. . ."

"Objection!" shouted Mary.

Arbitration

"On what grounds?"

"He used past tense! He said I *was* a virgin. I still am a virgin!"

"Okay, sustained, I guess."

Winkle continued his line of questioning. "Mr J, did you do that water into wine thing with your disciple friends?"

"Yeah, couple times, maybe."

"What about the loaves and fishes thing?"

"Yeah, ain't no law against it?"

"So you've turned a few tricks for them, then?"

"Objection!" screamed Mary.

"Sustained!" Moses frowned.

"Withdrawn!" Winkle chuckled. "Mr Jesus H. Christ did you and your cousin have sex with that girl in that tent?"

"No, we did not?" Jesus replied calmly.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I can be sure, because we only played doctors and nurses."

"Nothing further," said Winkle with a smirk on his face.

"People, we are adjourned," Moses sounded relieved. "Can I get a Amen?"

"Amen," responded the crowd.

The band fired up and the entertainment for the interval started. Winkle was right, that cheerleader looked good as new.

From out of nowhere, two grey haired gentlemen appeared, each with a microphone.

"Well, there's no doubt that round went to Winkle."

"Yes Ted, Winkle's come out rested and refreshed, and he's certainly up for this one."

"I don't know how Jesus survived that onslaught, but he clung on in there. At one point he was getting crucified. We'll be back, after these messages from your local sponsors."

John-the-Catholic turned to Winkle. "How's it going? We look to be doing okay, don't we? What do you think?"

"I think we got him on the run. If I can bury him on the birth-control issue. He won't be rising again any time soon."

"Birth Control?" I questioned.

"Sure, Mr J slipped up when he said Mags takes her birth-control, regular. There's ain't no need for birth-control in heaven. Do you see any kids round here?"

"Well, no," said the Rev.

"Exactly." Winkle grinned. "Ain't been a need for birth-control since the Mother Theresa scandal. God took care of it and sent her downstairs."

"How, why?" I asked.

"See all this lovely organic, reduced salt, low-fat, low-sugar, polyunsaturated, no additive, bland, food up here. Trust me there are additives. You won't find a fertile woman up here."

"What on earth is the Mother Theresa scandal?" The Reverend's faith was being slowly eroded. It appeared everything he believed in was either flawed, or a hoax. The news that Mother Theresa was in hell sent him white as a sheet.

"Listen up, guys." Winkle looked left and right before summoning us into a huddle. "It was bound to happen. You get an Albanian with what is basically an Italian religion. You got two of the world's most crooked cultures, right there. All that, Catholics can't take birth control, bull-shit, she made it all up just so she could perpetrate a fraud."

"I don't believe it!" gasped the Reverend.

"Believe me, John. Big time drug dealer, that one. Birth control and HRT, she had one awesome racket going on."

"Nah, get out of town with that." I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"The woman was a hood, trust me," said Winkle "The slogan; In God we trust; all others pay cash. Go checkout who owns the copyright."

"What was she doing?"

"I can't remember the exact details. She was creeping around selling candy, pretending they were drugs. God went psycho. Dealt her some serious blows, wrath and brimstone all over the place. I remember her laying there pathetically, saying; 'Help, I've fallen and I can't get up.'"

"Pssst! Pssst!" I was distracted by a sound coming from somewhere behind me in the fog. After following the sound, I traced it to a bush. As I leaned forward waiting for the sound to reoccur a woman's arm pulled me in.

"Mary, what are you doing here?" I asked as I recovered my feet.

"They're going to bring up the ARB enquiry into the 'immaculate conception'. I know they will. I can't go through that again."

"What did the ARB say?"

"Well, the ARB agreed the conception was immaculate but to me the whole matter was very embarrassing."

"What happened? Why would they call the conception into question?"

"Here's the thing. Joseph's mate Matthew did pop around one time, but nothing happened and I swear it. I'll swear on anything. There weren't no begatting going on . . ."

"It's okay, stay calm. What happened exactly."

"Well, Matthew knocked on the door . . . I answered the door with the safety chain on. I always did. I told Matthew, Joseph's not here right now."

"I know," replied Matthew. "God told me to come."

"Oh." I said, a little surprised.

"God said. I must com," insisted Matthew.

"Oh. Do you need to come in?" I asked him.

"Yes, I think I need to. It is God's will."

"Bugger! You'll have to go round the back."

"Why?" he asked.

Arbitration

"That's just the way it is," I told him. "Who the flip was he to question me, the Virgin Mary?"

At this point I was proud of myself. I needed to laugh. I was busting, but somehow I'm managed to keep a lid on it.

Mary carried on chatting away. "Anyway, turns out, there was some confusion. Apparently, Matthew went around the block and along the path that led to the back garden. I unbolted the front door and was looking for him up and down the street. When I couldn't find him, I decided she go shopping at the mall. There's a really nice shoe shop . . ." Mary stopped talking when she caught me laughing.

"Sorry, but it was funny."

Mary looked at me and kind of smiled. "I know you're a good guy Chris. I heard you say, you didn't want to see my boy going out like that."

"True, it ain't right."

"Well, I'll help you, if you help me, deal?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to instruct me in the ways," she said nervously.

"What ways?" I replied.

"The other ways."

"What other ways?"

"Doing the other."

"What other?"

"The other, other, as in, a bit of."

"Oh, that other." I watched her pulling on her cigarette. "Sorry ma'am, I can't."

"Why not?"

"You're the Virgin Mary!"

"So?"

"So, it's not right is it? I ain't going down in history for popping the Virgin Mary's cherry."

"I won't tell anybody."

"It's not the point."

"Aren't you attracted to me?"

"Now you mention it. No!"

"Why not?"

"It's worse than necrophilia, you're 2000 years old, and you're dead!"

"So are you."

"No I'm not, I'm 36 next month."

"No, ya daft bugger, you're dead too! A proper stiff!"

Her frank truth shocked me. I was dead, and worse than that, my dick never did recover from my wife's assault with the meat tenderiser.

"Well two wrongs don't make a right," I replied eventually.

"I'm buggered then." She cast her cigarette aside.

"Be careful, you might set the bush alight."

"I wish somebody bloody would." She sighed, before leaning on my shoulder and crying. "I just want my Joseph back."

"Where is he?"

"He sinned to get away from me. He's downstairs with his 'plaything', Eve."

"So, what went wrong between you and him?" I said, placing an arm around her to comfort her.

"We didn't do it."

"Do what?"

"It."

"What?"

"It it!"

"Oh that it. Why not?"

"He was really upset?"

"Why?"

"What? Other than your wife getting pregnant when you ain't getting none."

"When you put like that. I can see how he'd be kind of mad at you."

"I tried once."

"What happened?"

"He said he was a carpenter and by definition spent his days with stiff bits of wood. He didn't want one in bed with him at night."

"That's kind of harsh!"

"I know, but it was my fault. He was up for it."

"Mary, don't cry. We'll talk about this, if it helps. Look, maybe it's not entirely your fault."

"What do you mean?" she said, taking my hand.

"Well, in order to be a good driver. The first thing you gotta know is how to start the car," I suggested.

"Bugger! Do you know something? I've never thought of it that way, teach me please." She smiled at me with a suggestive twinkle.

"Not you, him." I frowned, and involuntarily rolled my eyes.

"Oh."

"Yeah, you got crank that motor, get all the lubricants flowing."

"Yeah."

"Get them oils warmed up."

"Definitely."

"Get them pistons pumping."

"Yes, pump, pump."

"Before you put it in to drive."

"Please, pump, drive! Put it in!"

"You give it a little more gas."

"Oh yes, more gas, more welly!"

"And when it settles."

"No, don't let it settle."

"We don't want to flood the engine."

"No, not yet. Don't flood!"

Arbitration

"Then,"

"Yes?"

"You grab that stick and you put it there!"

"Ram it home baby!! The hills are alive. . ." she burst into song.

"Cigarette?" offered Mary.

"Yeah, thanks," I replied.

"Am I still a virgin?"

"Yeah, I only started the car. You need to go find yourself a driver."

"What are you thinking about?" Mary blew smoke rings, and then playfully destroyed each one by poking her finger through its centre.

"Nothing really," I replied. "You?"

"Mags, I've always thought she was rather sexy, and she's got a very pert bottom, too!"

"Mary, we're gonna discuss how you can enjoy life to the full, and technically, you can hang on to that virgin title."

"Really? I'll be bugged! Well blow me! Sounds like a lot of fun."

"Girlfriend, you may well have an aptitude for this."

"Chris, fair's fair, I owe you." Mary smiled and linked my arm. "You need to get Mags on side."

"Mags? What can that crazy woman do?"

"Mags, Ms legally blonde, she's good. Mr Bennetton's scared of her. That's why you don't see him anymore. She embarrassed him, then left. Walked right out of heaven."

"Why's she still here then?"

"He can't let her leave, nobody leaves heaven of their own freewill. Especially after Eve ran off. Clicked her heels and went, she did. How would that look? If people didn't actually want to go to heaven."

"No, it wouldn't look good at all."

"Now, she gets away with murder. She cusses him. He won't do anything. He knows she'll leave."

"What happened?"

"Well, it was a little while ago. . ."

Mags stormed out of heaven, her suitcases packed, one in either hand, her mind full of fury.

"I've had enough of this!" she hissed. "It's a man's world. You're God. You're supposed to be in charge but you allow these awful things to go on. I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!"

"Mary come back, we can talk about this." Mr Bennetton spoke calmly; he may have sounded even slightly sympathetic. After all, he is God, it would have been wholly inappropriate for him to sound like he was begging.

"No!" she retorted. "I'm going to that other place, downstairs. I hear it's warmer there anyway, and there's no bloody fog, and they've got a clearance sale on Prada shoes and accessories. When I'm settled, I'll send for my girls. In this place, we'll never get any respect. Not while you're in charge."

"Mary. Please." His voice was warm and tender. "Why you gotta act like that?"

"R - E - S - P - E - C - T! . . . Dammit!"

"But. . ."

Mary cast her luggage to the floor. "Talk to the hand!" She looked away.

"Mary!" he boomed.

Thunder roared.

Hands on hips, she turned to him. "Your first big book! The one that went platinum. What was it called again? The one where that drug-smoking black man with the snakes in his head, he did the sound track. Bob, was it?"

"Exodus? Is that the one you mean?"

"Yeah, that was the fucker!" Mary was fuming. "Did you? Or did you not say. And I quote - '*I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children.*'"

"Why yes, I think so. I've had so many best-sellers, I can't remember them all."

"So what you're saying is. . . If dad messes up, the kids get busted."

"If you take it literally, then yes. But the little blighters. . ."

"Did you also say, later in that same book. '*You will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations*'?"

"Possibly I did," the great man replied. "What's your point?" Mary had been watching Sally McBeal in action, she *knew* how to handle this. "In effect you're saying, you're going to throw down that fire and brimstone,

wrath and vengeance stuff on the children and their children's children?"

"Yes, it's part of our new zero tolerance policy. Statistics show it's more of a deterrent than throwing Christians to lions."

Mary took a moment, rocked back on her heels and folded her arms. "After that, in your trilogy, Deuteronomy, did you not repeat the threat upon our children?" She pointed an accusing finger towards him. "And later, in that self-same trilogy, did you not say in direct contradiction, and again I quote. *'Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.'*"

"Mag's, let's not concentrate on the negatives. With the exception of Macclesfield and Normal, Illinois, sinning is down worldwide. And that particular statement refers to capital punishment."

"Answer the question, dammit," she insisted. "Did you, or did you not, make that statement?"

"Are we talking about the book, or the movie?"

"The damn movie was a flop, and you know it!" she blasted him. "There was no movie, Twentieth Century Beaver, cancelled it, and even the mini-series ran out of budget."

"Yes. It was a rather tragic turn of events, wasn't it. Proof readers! Personally, I blame them. They are just not dedicated like they used to be. You just can't get the staff."

"God!" She marched right up to the confessional. His beard poked through wire mesh, tickling her chest.

Mary Magdalene giggled before readopting her stern poker face. "Don't you try that immaculate conception shit with me. You had your chance. Besides, I'm your son's woman. You really are sick."

"It was an accident. Now, what point were you trying to make?"

"Who is Ezekiel?" Mary made to turn away from him, but cleverly, made a complete three hundred and

sixty degree turn. Even though separated by a grille, they were face to face. "Before you answer," she added. "May I remind you, that you, sir, are under oath."

The statement, briefly unsettled him. "Under oath? Under oath to whom exactly? "

"If you can't be honest with yourself? Then. . ."

"Ezekiel, Ezekiel is my main man, my publicist, runs my press office. Can't get good workers like that any more. He deserves his fat cat salary, and the bonuses, to boot."

"Would that be the same Ezekiel that sent many of your worshippers to their deaths? The self-same Ezekiel that encouraged many Christians to go to Rome - A place where Christians could allegedly get stoned! In public!" Mags smirked before tucking her hand into her imaginary waistcoat. "I put it to you, Lord, that upon your authority. Ezekiel reinforced and highlighted your great contradiction by releasing the press release. And again I quote." Mary's face had never been more serious. "*The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity.*"

Mr Bennetton was becoming bored with the woman's tiresome questions. "You got me, and what? So sue me. It's not the only contradiction I've ever made."

"But it wasn't a contradiction was it? When you spoke of vengeance, it was always on the children. You big fat bully!"

"And?"

"Whether it be a retraction, or an amendment, immunity was spoken of only for the sons."

"What's your point?"

"The children must bear your wrath but the boys don't have to?" She kissed her teeth. "That just leaves us

girls then, doesn't it?"

"But. . ."

"Talk to the hand!" She raised her hand then slowly began to wave. Mary picked up her bags and marched out of the gates. "Talk to somebody!" she shouted back. "You've got a problem with women."

"Maggie, come back."

"Kiss my lilly-white ass."

So that's what happened. I swear it.

The music and the fanfare started up again. I knew it was time. We headed back to the arena. Mary skipped along, whistling, and trying to hold my hand. "Call me, lover," she said as we parted. I returned to my seat and nudged Winkle, who was asleep, mouth open.

"Heavenly court is now in session," announced the bailiff.

Moses banged his gavel. "Can I get a Amen!"

"Amen," the crowd responded.

"I can't go school today Mom, my belly hurts," mumbled Winkle.

Moses banged his gavel frantically, to no effect. "Somebody wake him up, dammit!"

A sharp crack of thunder pierced the air.

Winkle jumped up.

"Here, you've got a little dribble running down." I passed him a tissue.

"I call Dr Google to the stand." Jesus smiled wryly.

"Is this your expert witness?" inquired Moses.

"Yes, your awesomeness, it is."

"Expert in what field?"

"All of them," Jesus replied smugly.

"Oh, right." Moses seemed confused. "Dr Google?" He asked, as the doctor shuffled his way to the stand.

"What exactly are your areas of expertise?"

"All of them. I know everything." The bespectacled Dr Google clutched his notepad in his hand.

"Any objection?" Moses turned to Winkle.

"None whatsoever."

"None?"

"None, sir." Winkle seemed remarkably confident and assured.

Moses gestured for proceedings to continue.

Winkle looked on, arms folded.

"Dr Google." Jesus addressed his witness. "Please tell the court exactly what you are expert in."

"Everything. Everybody knows, I know everything. That's why they ask me, because I know all that there is to know."

"Then tell these fools; the Reverend John Smith is not any relation to God or any of my family." Jesus gestured theatrically.

"Objection," Winkle said calmly whilst picking dirt from under his nails. "Leading the witness."

"Sustained," agreed Moses.

Jesus rolled his eyes. "Mr Google. . ."

"It's Doctor. I'm Doctor Google."

"Doctor friggin' Google! Is John-the-Catholic related to God?"

"I can find no reference to John-the-Catholic. Did you mean John-the-Baptist?"

Jesus grabbed Dr Google by his lapels and dragged him halfway over the witness stand. "Listen you pedantic little shit!"

"Objection." Winkle interrupted. "He doesn't have permission to treat this witness as hostile."

"Overruled," replied Moses. "If he doesn't stop being so pedantic I'll come round there and kick his ass myself. Jesus – let him go. Google – get on with it."

Dr Google's eyes flicked down to his pad. "In as much as all humans are deemed to be God's children, then yes, John Smith is your Brother."

"Listen fool!" Jesus snapped. "In the biological, physical sense, D – N blasted A! sense! Are me and that fool." He pointed at The Reverend.

"God-damned!"

Thunder rumbled.

“Muthafuckin’”

Lightning blinded everybody.

“Kin!”

“Well.” Dr Google glanced at his pad once more. “No, you are not related.”

Jesus, sweat dripping down his forehead, relaxed “Hally bleedin' luya. Thank you, you geek fool! I'm done.” He turned to the court. “If the man that knows everything says - it ain't true. I think we can send this fool white man downstairs and go 'bout our business. Your witness, Winkle.” Jesus smirked and indicated via hand gesture he thought Winkle, a wanker. “The man knows everything, perhaps he can tell you who your Daddy *really* is.” Jesus returned to his seat. He sat, a smug expression on his face.

The crowd laughed on cue.

Personally I didn't think it was *that* funny. “What the. . .?” I mumbled.

“DDSSRLS.” Mary skipped up and whispered in my ear. “Dolby Digital Surround Sound Recorded Laughter System, God got it for Jesus for his birthday.”

“You mean Christmas?”

“Whatever.” She shrugged her shoulders.

“Dr Google!” Winkle bellowed, causing Mary and I to be silent.

“Well, according to original records . . . Mr Winkle, your real father is. . .” Google started to answer Jesus'

original question.

"Shut up," snapped Winkle. "You're on my time now. You answer my questions, not his, get it?" Winkle was not smiling. He approached Dr Google. "Mr Know-it-all Google. Where does God live?"

"In heaven," Google replied smartly.

"So you're saying God does actually exist?"

"Unknown."

"Right, just to clarify. You know where he lives, but you don't know if he lives there. I thought you said you knew everything?"

"I know all that is known, I do not know the unknown."

"I give up, Dr Google, I thank you most sincerely for your time." Winkle offered his hand.

As Google stretched one hand out, Winkle ripped his notepad away from him.

"Give me that back!" cried Dr Google.

"Smart kids don't cheat on the test!" Winkle stated confidently. "Now, Mr, I'm so clever, I can shit without stinkin', Google. Let's start easy, before we go on to double jeopardy! Where the really big prizes are on offer. What is two plus two?"

Google stared at the floor.

"Okay," continued Winkle. "Maybe maths isn't your good subject. How about spelling? Spell your own name!"

"Erm," Google spluttered and stuttered.

"I'm waiting." Winkle folded his arms and tapped his foot. Eventually Google hung his head. "I don't know," he admitted.

“That’s right.” Winkle laughed and tapped Google on the shoulder. “You’re just an ignorant gossiping bitch.”

Thunder roared, (more of a tremble really).

The crowd gasped.

“You don’t actually know anything, do you Dr Google? There’s nothing in that thick skull of yours.” He poked his finger at Google’s temple. “You just repeat any little bit of gossip you hear. You don’t check any of it, do you? You don’t authenticate or cross-reference. That tongue wags, those lips blab. You just tell anybody who asks, like it’s the Gospel.”

Thunder cracked violently.

“Whatever!” Mags showed her resolute defiance by looking up and making a particularly unladylike gesture with her middle finger.

Winkle waited for everything to settle before continuing. “You don’t know anything on Earth and. . .” He snatched Google’s glasses off his face, “now you can’t see anything either. Ain’t that the truth?”

“Yes,” agreed Google, fumbling blindly in the air.

“Yes? Yes What?” queried Moses.

"Yes," confirmed Google.

"Why are you agreeing with him?" asked Jesus.

"Because he just said it," Google replied.

Moses sighed.

Jesus sighed.

The crowd sighed.

Winkle shook his head. "Expert witness, my ass is an expert witness."

"Yes," agreed Google.

"Yes what?"

"Yes, your ass is an expert witness."

The crowd laughed.

I laughed, a little too loudly.

Winkle gave me a harsh look.

I shut up.

Winkle passed Google back his book.

"You're supposed to be on my side." Winkle glared at me.

"I think it's kind of harsh to rough up Dr Google like that." I thought I should at least defend the guy.

Arbitration

“WTF?” Winkle looked at me like I was some kind of piece of shit that he'd scraped from his shoe.

“You didn't need to embarrass the man. You're the idiot.” I pointed and cussed him.

“WTF? You two are supposed to be on the same team,” said Mary.

“Objection!” said Jesus.

“WTF?” said Moses. “You can't object. They're on the same team. You guys quit arguing, and can we move on?”

“WTF?” said Mags.

“WTF? What exactly does WTF mean?” John asked.

Do you know when your mouth takes off sometimes and your brain just can't keep up? Like a fool. - I answered him.

“These people all keep saying WTF. They don't realise how stupid they sound. You can't actually say W-T-F! It's what-the-fuck!”

Now, do you know those folk who get struck by lightning and survive? I am feeling their pain, trust me on that. The Almighty sent down a gazillion almighty volts. Jesus wept! (Actually he creased up laughing.) God got me right on one of my butt cheeks. It super stung me like the worst kind of bitch. I'm left standing there in agony. My knees are trembling and my ass is smokin' and smellin' like barbecued burger.

“WTF?” The Reverend laughed, pointing at my smokin' butt.

“S-SMOKIN'!!!!” A fella with a green face stood up and shouted.

“That guy, is he wearing a some sort of a mask?” asked the Reverend.

“I don't give a damn . . .”

The crack of thunder saved me from strike two.

“Here.” Mags passed me a rubber ring. “You'll need this to sit on for a coupla weeks. The fucker got me once.” She looked to the horizon, daring him - Nothing. “Right here.” She lifted her skirt to reveal a red mark on her left buttock.

And Oh! Jesus! That leopard-skin thong just looked – dirty. “Lordy! Lordy! Lordy!” I cried (literally) “Bless You. You *do* work in mysterious ways. Give thanks and praise.” My circulation had returned, I felt life, movement in my pants.

Mags noticed my growing passion and winked at me.

I pretended to adjust my fly. Just so I could feel that everything was workin' again.

She flicked her eyes toward the bush.

Yay! I was gonna get me some, road-test this mutha right now. I licked my lips.

“Order!” Moses banged his gavel.

“Later then.” Mags waved cheekily as she sloped off.

“WTF?” I said, annoyed with Moses.

“Sure, definitely, call me.”

Jesus eyed me.

“WTF?” I cursed to Mags, confused.

“Yes, the fuck. Ahem! The sexual act! - later!” Mags shouted back.

Jesus growled.

“Nothing further.” Winkle shook his head.

“The witness is excused.” Moses gestured for Google to leave the stand.

“Fool!” Jesus called after him.

“WTF?” The Reverend scratched his head.

“Yahoo!” Winkle celebrated.

On leaving the stand, Dr Google dropped his book, tripped over it, went careering across the court, and collided with the cheerleader. The cheerleader stumbled, got her foot caught in the rubber ring which I'd thoughtlessly placed on the floor. She hurtled into the judge's bench.

CRASH! - BANG! – WALLOP! – WHIZZ!!

Yup, WHIZZ. The cheerleader's head flew! She'd decapitated herself, her head came clean off. Maybe it was

still weak from the last time, who knew? Anyway, it went flying through the air, Winkle caught it one-handed.

“How can the same shit happen to the same girl twice?” He looked at the head, bemused.

“Bugger!” said Mary.

The cheerleader ran around the court like a headless chicken. Come to think of it, it was more like a headless cheerleader. - Never mind.

“I think these are yours.” Winkle walked over to Google whilst keeping an eye on the wandering headless cheerleader.

Google reached out and felt the head, and pulled a face of disgust.

“Not that! - These!” Winkle slapped Google's hand away and placed the Doctor's glasses back onto his face.

“Fuck!” said Google the second the headless cheerleader came into focus.

CRACK! - Google's ass was blazin' from a lightning strike, he hopped around screaming and holding his backside.

Winkle grabbed hold of the wandering cheerleader the moment she came within his reach. “I think this is yours.” He pushed her detached and bloody head against her abdomen, and then secured it with her hands. “Hold on to it. Don't worry, everything's cool.” He patted her on her back. “Mary!” He turned and beckoned the virgin mother.

Winkle's fly was open and the cheerleader caught an eyeful from a range of about six-inches. She dropped her head in shock.

Everybody watched as the head rolled away. A tall gentleman picked up the head and jumped, he seemed to hang in the air for ages before he flicked head across the court.

"That was like magic," said John-the-Catholic.

"No, Magic's downstairs. God hates the Lakers. Don't ask me why?" replied Winkle. "That was Jordan. Checkout the Nikes."

A burly man ran across arena watching over his right shoulder as the head flew towards him. He leapt, plucking the head out the air.

The crowd cheered.

"Touchdown! Heaven's Angels!" The man with the big headphones said enthusiastically.

The man who'd caught the head, leapt into the air a second time, hi-fived Moses with one hand and slammed the head into the ground with the other. The moment he landed he started some strange celebratory dance.

"Jerry! Quit it already. Why you always gotta do that?" Winkle moved across the court.

"Oh, I get it," said John-the-Catholic. "I think I'm learning this 'keeping up' business. The way that man sprung into the air to catch that head. That means he's Gerry Springer, doesn't it?"

"No." I shook my head. "That'd be Jerry Rice."

"Blast!" John expressed his frustration.

The cheerleader's head must have bounced thirty-feet high with a startled expression on its face.

Dr Google caught the head, squealed at the amount of blood coming out and quickly placed it on the ground.

Another guy came running up and swung his right foot at it.

Winkle, snatched the cheerleader's head out of the way saying, "Forget about the point after." He tossed the head to Mary. "Can you take her to the rest-room? Help her fix her face a little. Don't worry, she can walk it off. She'll be fine, trust me on that." He wiped his bloody hands on Google's shirt.

Moses banged his gavel. "We are in recess." He rose from his seat. "Thirty-minutes," He said before glancing in the cheerleader's direction, and wincing. The poor girl stood there looking pitiful, her own battered head in her hands. "On second thought; give it a good couple of hours . . . And . . ." Moses banged his gavel, again, and rose to his feet. "Can I get a Amen!"

"Amen," the crowd responded

ARBITRATION - ACT III

"Heavenly court is now in session," announced the bailiff.

Moses banged his gavel. "Can I get a Amen!"

"Amen," the crowd responded

"I said, can I get a Amen. I can't hear y'all!!"

"Amen!!" the crowd boomed in unison.

"Now that's what I'm talkin' bout." He took his seat. "Now, is King James in da house?"

"Say what?" The bailiff looked confused.

"I think he means . . . Can I get a witness?" I said, laughing.

"King James to the stand, please," ordered Moses

"Which one?" asked the bailiff.

"That stand, you idiot." Moses pointed. "We've only got the one stand."

"No, your awesomeness. Which King James?"

"The first one." Moses rolled his eyes.

"Well." The bailiff pointed across the court. "He was first, if you're English, but sixth if you're Scottish. . ."

"Do I look like either to you?" Moses stared the bailiff down.

The bailiff escorted one of the two kings to the stand.

Moses warned the King. "If you give me any trouble. I'll enter you into the HOE program."

"Hoe?" Reverend John asked.

"You really don't get out much, do you?" I replied. "Don't you know what a ho is?"

"I know what a hoe is."

"You do?"

"Of course I do. It's a garden tool, even I know that. I'm not totally stupid." John said with glee. "A hoe program. I suppose it's some kind of gardening work party, isn't it?"

"More like Moses is gonna pimp out James' ass. Gardening? Yeah, right. They'll be digging all right, digging, for sure – digging a hole in his butt!"

Mags giggled.

"Actually you're both wrong," Mary joined the conversation. "HOE stands for, Hell on Earth or Heaven on Earth."

"Technically," Winkle interrupted. "There is no Heaven on Earth program. Nick caused it to be abandoned."

"There they go again with this Nick character." I spoke, but I was ignored.

"Here's the thing." Mary headed Winkle off. "People weren't ever supposed to be this bad. Or rather, there were never supposed to be this many bad people. Hell's full. Hell's always been full. The place was over subscribed

and overcrowded from the first day it opened. Mr Bennetton and Nicholas had to come up with an emergency plan. . .”

“So they got themselves a HOE.” I laughed.

“And where's this HOE now?” asked John-the-Catholic.

“On Earth, you stupid bugger.” Mary sighed heavily. “When you're released from hell, you are stripped of any religion and painted yellow, so you can be recognised instantly if you need to be tracked and returned.

“Where on Earth?” John frowned.

“China!” Winkle and Mary exclaimed in unison.

“There are 1.3 billion people in China. Are you saying, that many people have been released from Hell?” My voice squeaked, shocked at the revelation.

Moses banged his gavel. “I'm sorry to interrupt you people from your little chit-chat but Heavenly court is in session.”

“Sorry.”

“Sorry.”

“Sorry.”

“Sorry.”

I hadn't noticed, but Jesus had been sitting quietly cross-legged, frantically crocheting. I was amazed at how good he was at it. Trust me, the man had some lightning speed, and some deft, nimble fingers.

Mary noticed be watching him. “I taught him when he was just nine. As a boy he used to love crocheting. He became withdrawn after the incident on holiday. I taught him crochet to occupy himself.”

“What incident?”

“We were at an Oasis in the Sahara, lovely place, wonderful food. Jesus was building sandcastles, as kids do. Maybe it was my fault? I should have watched him more closely.”

“What happened?”

“A sandstorm blew in. We were packing up to go home, and his father, my husband, asked him where exactly he'd buried the Ark of the Covenant. His little face as he pointed out into the desert and said 'In the sand'. Tears welled up in his little eyes. Joseph was so angry. 'Your not being very helpful, are you?' he said as he shook him. After that, his father grounded him for six-months, and stopped talking to him. Now, Jesus seems to crochet when he's bored or stressed. He's made almost 100,000 pairs of baby-booties,” she explained.

Bewildered, I shrugged my shoulders.

“It's the only thing I had a pattern for.” She shrugged in response.

“But Mary, there are no children in heaven.” I whispered.

“Shh! Don't go upsetting him.” She placed a finger to her lips whilst casting her eyes to Jesus.

Moses tapped his gavel sharply and looked at us as if we were naughty school-kids. “HOE!” he threatened.

King James took the stand, he too, looked kind of familiar. A piece of his ear was missing.

“What happened to his ear?” I whispered to Winkle.

“Somebody bit it off in a fight. One of his employees, or so I hear.”

“And why does his hair stand up like that?”

“I think it's where he took his crown off. It ain't like he can wear it up here, is it? Up here in heaven, he ain't the 'man', he ain't no 'Don', not up here in the Lord's house, he ain't. I don't think it's the type of attitude you wanna

promote.”

“King,” Jesus addressed the witness. “Did you, or did you not translate the entire Bible for the western world?”

“Not me personally, no, I was off doing other kingy stuff.”

“I’ll rephrase the question then, fool. Did you, instigate and oversee the translation of the good book, and subsequently authorise its publication and distribution?”

“Yes.”

“And contained within that good book, is there any information, any passage, any verse or text; that would indicate or lead a reader to believe.” Jesus pointed accusingly at John, “That fool there,” he dropped his tone. “And me, the great, Jesus Christ super-star, man of many miracles, are kin-folk?”

“No.”

“Thank you, Mr King,” Jesus said proudly.

“I knew it,” I whispered to Winkle. “That’s Don King.”

“Who’s Don King?” asked Mary, crouching beside me.

Winkle looked at the pair of us and shook his head.

“Nothing further.” Jesus strutted back to continue his crocheting.

I wondered if he knew how dumb he looked in a 3-piece suit and open-toed sandals.

“You or me?” Winkle mouthed to Mary, flicking his finger back and forth.

Mary pointed back at him mouthing, “you.”

"James. How are ya? How's the family." Winkle approached the witness and picked up the Bible from in front of him. "So you, sorry, your people, produced this book right here." He passed the bible to James. "Is it accurate?"

"Yes."

"Authentic?"

"Yes."

"Would you swear on it?" asked Winkle.

King James hesitated.

"You are holding it, so I guess you are swearing on it," said Winkle.

Again the king was hesitant. A bead of sweat appeared on his forehead.

Winkle continued. "I guess it wouldn't matter. If you're swearing on it, and it's wrong, then it's not authentic. If it's not authentic, it ain't the truth. So I guess you'll get away with it. Kind of like having your fingers crossed when you swear."

The King opened his mouth to speak.

Winkle interrupted him. "Then again, there's the letter of the law and the spirit of the law." He paused before adding, "and then there's good old wrath!"

"But it does say E&OE."

Arbitration

"Errors and omissions my ass. Is it accurate or not?" Winkle fired the question like a gunshot.

"There may be a few slight discrepancies between that and the original text."

"Like?"

"Erm. . ."

"Well?"

"Erm. . ."

"What sort of discrepancies, god-dammit!"

Thunder roared.

"In the beginning. . ."

"What are you gonna do? Recite the whole thing?"

"Word."

"In the beginning was the word, yes, we all know that."

"No!" James spat. "In the beginning there was no Word. They wanted it, but I said no."

"What?" Winkle stood, publicly scratching his bottom.

"Do you know how much Microsoft . . ."

A blast of thunder interrupted him.

King James waited for the court to settle. "The price of a 10-user license was highway robbery. I didn't have

them kind of shekels.”

“WTF?”

“We weren't even going to translate the thing! We had a typewriter; it was going to be a book about a dog. I suffer from mild dyslexia, and we didn't have any Tippex.”

“What's Tippex?” asked Mags.

“Sticky white stuff,” whispered Mary. “It's used for correcting typographical errors.”

“Oh, I'll start saving it then shall I?”

“Shh!” Mary silenced her.

Winkle continued. “I see. So that's how it went down Mr King.”

Moses frowned.

Winkle changed his tone. “Mr King, let's cut to the chase. What happened to Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30, and is there any evidence that Jesus and my client could be kin-folk?”

“I don't know.”

“What do you mean? - You don't know.”

“We had an ink-jet printer. It came free with the computer. The ink ran out. Do you know how much they wanted for one little ink cartridge? Robbing bastards. . .”

“Why didn't you just re-print those pages?”

“We did. It said 'Resume' on the screen. I clicked 'OK'. We didn't know it had printed 241 blank pages before the cartridge was primed and ready. And we couldn't get any help. Do you know how much they charge for their so-called support?”

Winkle paced the court. “Okay, let's move this along. We need to find out about Nick, but that whole 12-30

part is missing, and the rest is full of errors.”

“I wouldn't say full. There are a few common mistakes, that's all,” replied the King.

“Like?”

“Little words, like 'to' and 'the', tended to get left out or inserted where they didn't really belong.”

I stood up. I'd had an epiphany, or some kind of divine inspiration. “I think I found out where this Nick guy comes from. I think he may be Jesus' twin brother, if anything.”

“Excuse me, you stupid bugger,” Mary challenged me. “I was actually there. There was just baby Jesus, the associated blood and general of mess childbirth, and the gas. I'd do it again, just for the gas. You have to have the gas. It's wicked.”

Jesus threw down his crochet needles in embarrassment.

“So how does this twin brother miraculously appear after the birth of Christ?” asked the Reverend.

“Blame him.” I pointed to the King. “He's *the* one with *the* typos. Inserting *the* words in the wrong place.”

“I was well out of it. I just remember the gas, loved that gas! And yuck.” Mary shuddered. “All that mess.”

There was massive disturbance amongst the crowd. Moses folded his arms, waiting for people to settle.

Jesus stormed off.

“I guess he doesn't want to redirect.” Winkle swung his arms jovially. “So Nick's the afterbirth of Christ.

Who knew? That little word 'the' just kind of snuck in there. That's gotta be the mother of all typos."

"I was only hypothesise . . . hypo . . . - suggesting. . ." I said.

"Good shooting kid." Winkle slapped me on my back.

Mags strutted back into the arena with her sexy switch. "I want you," she said, pointing to the Reverend.

"Batter up," said Winkle.

"My man's in it now – deep in it," I said.

"John-the-Catholic. Do you understand that you represent all white men, the little people?" Mags peeped over the witness stand, appearing to eye his crotch.

"That had to hurt," I whispered.

"Shh!" Winkle rebuked me.

"Y-yes," the Rev replied nervously.

"Okay." She smiled at him quickly before raising her voice. "Let me start with cruelty animals in the name of sport."

"I think we've learned our lesson. We've banned fox-hunting," the Reverend stated proudly

"My ex-wife banned fox-hunting. She caught me one time in a bar with this red-head. . . Ouch!" Winkle elbowed me in the ribs – hard. "That Mags, now she is a fox," I added before the pain set in.

"I'm referring to football and cruelty to pigs!" said Mags.

"Excuse me?" replied the witness, a puzzled look on his face.

"Do you? Or do you not?" She picked up a sheet of paper from her desk. "Have a large number, twenty-two

or more, or so I'm led to believe, of men, partake in the kicking of a pig around a field. I believe you refer to this as 'sport.' Football or soccer or something?"

"Pssst!" Mary tugged Mags by her jacket. "They use the pig's bladder."

"Oh," gasped Mags. "My learned colleague informs me, the pig has to be kicked in its bladder."

"You misunderstand," explained the witness. "The bladder is removed from the pig first."

"I see." Mags raised her eyebrows sharply, "and how does the pig feel about that? Where's it supposed to keep its pee?"

"Well actually . . ."

"Enough!" she snapped. "You torturous bastards." Mags slid up to the Reverend sexily, using everything she had, beckoning him with her finger as if she wanted to whisper something into his ear.

Me? I was memorised. She deployed that granddaddy clock pendulum switch, together with a 5/4 double-time titty bounce as she walked. How could she do that? It was like when you try to rub your stomach while patting your head, dammit.

The rumble of thunder was so quiet it was hardly worth mentioning.

"Cherry?" She picked the fruit out of the judge's bowl.

"No, thank you."

"Are you sure?" She licked, then sucked on the fruit before swallowing it, whole. "Mwaah!" Mags smacked her lips. "I love to swallow it. It's just so juicy. Slides down nice'n'easy."

John-the-Catholic swallowed hard and made the sign of the cross over his chest.

"Johnny boy. You know you want to!" She produced another cherry and dangled it in front of his nose. "Come on Snookums, open wide." She pouted, took his hand and began to suck his finger.

"Objection!" bawled Jesus. "She's sucking his. . ."

"Suckstained!" Moses licked his lips, banged his gavel, but didn't realise where his other hand was. "JFC!" he squealed.

"Don't you mean JFK?" I mumbled.

"No, he means JFC – Jesus fucking Christ." Mags cast a defiant look into the distance - Silence.

Entranced, the Reverend opened his mouth. "Owf!" he shrieked.

"God-damn." Winkle covered his eyes.

Thunder rumbled.

I gasped. "That had to hurt." I was remembering how long Mag's nails actually were.

"Jesus Christ," said Mary.

"Yes?" asked Jesus.

"Yes indeed," said Moses.

"Holy Mary, mother of. . ." said Winkle.

"Not now!" snapped Mary.

"Ow! Ooh! Ah! Ah!" The Reverend sounded like he was in some serious pain. The second he'd opened his mouth, Mags had hooked her finger inside his cheek and pulled as hard as she could.

"Fishing!" She tugged a little harder, "Sport? Huh!" Mags began to lead him around the court. "Do you

think the fish see it as – sport? Bastard!”

“Ouch!”

“You're swimming along,” she continued. “Johnny, we're walking!” She quickened her pace. “You spot something you fancy a little bit of. You open your mouth expecting a piece of something tasty, then. . .” She tugged at his cheek.

“Ouch!”

“You get hooked.” She pushed the Reverend onto the ground, hitched up her skirt, and sat on his face. Kneeling astride him, Mags continued to address the court over his muffled sounds.

“It's not very nice is it?” she said as the Reverend squirmed beneath her.

“Me? I'm not convinced. I mean, maybe it ain't so bad.” I mumbled behind my hand.

“You get pulled from your natural environment. You can't breathe. You're suffocating. They call it sport! It wouldn't be so bad if you intended to eat the fish.”

“I eat fish. I love it.” I raised my hand.

Mary pulled my hand down sharply. “We can discuss your appetite for fish - later,” she whispered. “Somewhere more private. Maybe the three of us can discuss it together.”

Mags finished off her speech. “And just when you think you're going to die.” She paused. Reverend John lay silent, his body still. “They throw you back and tell you to go on your merry way.” She rose to her feet and fixed her skirt.

John was left semi-conscious on the ground.

Winkle emptied the contents of a glass of water onto his face. I could tell - Rev John was seeing stars.

“But why?” John, in distress, asked Mags.

Mary Magdalene walked over and whispered into his ear, "I'm just fucking with you?"

Thunder rumbled (faintly).

"Or would you rather be a fish?" Winkle said tunefully.

"Fish nets, I can see the attraction now," I mused.

"We are in recess." Moses tapped his gavel delicately. "Can I get a Amen!"

"Amen," the crowd responded in hushed tones.

Moses stood behind his bench, surveying the crowd before fixing his eyes on John. "Reverend Smith, have you recovered from your ordeal? Are you happy to proceed?" asked Moses.

"Yes, your honour," he replied.

Moses gestured to the bailiff.

"Heavenly court is now in session," boomed the bailiff.

"I love this job!" Moses banged his gavel. "Can I get a Amen!"

"Amen," the crowd responded enthusiastically.

"And can somebody wake Winkle up!"

Mags pouted at the Reverend, you could tell, she unsettled him. He flinched as she approached the witness

stand.

"Mr Smith." Mags attitude was more business-like and she'd changed her outfit to match her role. She leaned against the witness stand, one hand tucked into the pocket of her pin-striped trouser-suit. "Do you know of any other animal other than the Caucasian that would kill another for sport?"

The Rev scratched his head. "The native Americans used to enjoy hunting buffalo."

"For enjoyment?"

"I believe so, yes."

"To enjoy, Mr Smith, was not the object of the exercise. Food and warmth, Mr Smith. Food and warmth. They ate, and they were housed and clothed. There was no waste - I'll give you a little time for thought. We'll perhaps touch on this again. Did your mates visit Africa?"

"I believe my ancestors did, yes."

"And do you suppose they marvelled at all the weird and wonderful wildlife?"

"I suppose."

"Come Reverend, the vast size of the elephant; the vivid colours and beauty of tiger and leopard skins. Surely your ancestors must have been in awe."

"Probably."

"Then why in God's name," she erupted, "did you shoot the poor bastards dead?"

"Food and warmth?" he offered tamely.

"Rhino fricassee, mmm, sounds yummy – I think not!"

"Warmth then?"

"If you are cold? Why not take the wool from a sheep, or the skin of your best friends – Lassie, Fido, Rover,

all those dogs you seem to love so much. Why destroy other people's friends?"

"I don't know," stuttered John.

"Thou shall not covet!" she spat furiously. "You have coveted the teeth of the elephant, the stripes of tiger, the horn of the rhinoceros."

"Those are all dangerous animals."

"Indeed, but not nearly dangerous enough to keep you lot away. They were no match for your guns!" Ms Mary Magdalene was livid; the woman was spitting nails and fire; I'm telling you she was hot. Mags was abusing the Reverend like she was some kind of dominatrix. I had no sympathy for the man. In fact, I was jealous. I was getting all hot and horny just watching. I imagined her with a whip in a skin-tight Spandex and leather cat-suit – ouch! - Can I get a Amen?

"Next, you'll be claiming there were man-eating minks," she finished.

Reverend John swallowed again. I saw his Adam's-apple bounce. "But. . ."

"But nothing!" she screamed in his face. "I put it to you, that you went to that place, with your warmongering selves and killed all those animals for reasons of vanity and greed."

"Objection!" cried Winkle.

"Piss off!" replied Mags.

Moses looked at Winkle and shrugged his shoulders.

"I further put it to you." Mags continued. "That when you started to run out of animals to hunt and shoot, you started on the natives. And when you found that their skins were no good for making clothes and their bodies

didn't have the same taste as a steak and kidney pie, you started selling the people themselves, alive, as pets, and agricultural animals. And I further put it to you, that when you'd sold them all, you took their land, and took the diamonds, and the gold, and the oil it yielded, as your own."

"But."

"Save it Mr! Having raped that land and robbed those people, you turned to selling drugs."

"Drugs?"

"Yes, I put it to you, that having gotten a taste for being, murderers, terrorists, and menaces to societies, you became drug dealers."

"Drug dealers?"

"Is there and echo in here. Yes, drug dealers, drug pushers." She produced a notepad. "Did you? Or did you not, sell the Chinese 1,200 tonnes of opium, and steal Hong Kong while they were all smashed out of their skulls, singing 'Lucy in the sky with diamonds.'"

The Reverend hung his head. "It wasn't quite like that."

I was thinking, after all those hardcore drugs, my eyes would be kind of slitty too.

"Yes, be ashamed!" Mags was up in his face again. "And on the way to China or wherever, did you not terrorise the seven seas and kill every whale you came across?" She glanced at her notes. "Ah yes, those dirty thieving A-rabs wanted a fortune for crude oil. So you used whale blubber to burn, and also found that it was good for your dirty stinky armpits."

"But. . ."

"I object." Winkle tried again.

"Noted," said Moses in a resigned tone.

"Then." Mags ignored Winkle and the Judge. She continued to pound the clergyman. "You thought you'd visit the Australians. Try out your latest germ-warfare technology – AIDS.

"No we did not! Aborigines did not die from AIDS," John objected.

"You lot are so transparent. Everybody up here knows it was the prototype. Common cold my ass. The Maoris were tough little sods, you never beat them, they just put up with you like a cockroach infestation."

"But."

"Shut it lard-ass! You played the same tactics on the American Native Indians, killed those buggers and stole their shit. You even had the cheek to buy New York from them for twenty-five bucks, after convincing them it was a large amount for such worthless real estate. You dirty thieving bastards! You wouldn't play nicely with Japanese people either. What is wrong with you? Just because in some silly war game they smashed up a few of your silly aeroplanes and ships; you dropped a nuclear bomb on them, twice!"

"But."

"But what?" she screamed.

"But my ancestors came from Iceland." John burst into tears.

"Oh?"

"Move to dismiss." Jesus jumped up, not attempting to disguise his celebratory voice.

"On what grounds?" Moses eyed him.

"The mother's from Iceland, you know there ain't nobody from Jerusalem going near that icebox. Me and that fool can't be kin." Jesus jumped up and down for joy.

Moses raised his gavel high in the air. "Case dis. . ."

"Objection!" cried a voice.

"You can't object now, I've ruled." Moses peered over the top of his glasses.

The crowd gasped at the surprise appearance of St Sally McBeal. "No you haven't. You haven't banged it. The thing needs to be banged." She pointed at his gavel.

"Well, I was about to." He cast his eyes to his gavel. He held it, stopped, part way in the action of descent.

"If the thingy hasn't been banged, it doesn't count," said Ms McBeal.

"I've been trying to tell them that for years," mumbled the Virgin Mary.

"Yup, it needs banging, and a proper banging too," agreed Mags. "And after that, bang it again, hard. Why not? See what happens." She focused her attention on Jesus. "Bang it as hard as you can. Maybe it wants its hair pulled, or to be covered in chocolate, and to be licked all over. Maybe you think it's satisfied with the odd bang now and again, but perhaps it wants to be banged all night, and all day. Maybe it seeks release. It's passion rekindled. Did ever think about it wants? Did you think it would be satisfied with a quickie when you wanted it? Self! Self! Self! You make me sick! Maybe, it wants to be constantly banged until it screams for mercy, turns over and begs to be banged a different way. And then, banged, and banged, and banged, and banged . . ."

"Mags!" The Virgin Mary snapped the other out of her passionate monologue. Her sharp word, amplified by the comparative silence pierced through the court.

The entire court stood, eyes trained on Mary Magdalene, their mouths open, the silence – deafening. Mags seemed out of breath, starry-eyed, and a bit weak at the knees.

“What?” She shifted her weight and tossed her hair to one side. “I was just sayin’.”

“Now that’s what I call a proper session,” announced the bailiff.

“Amen,” the crowd responded, cheering and clapping.

“Wow! She’s freaky.” I turned to the Virgin Mary. “Do you have a cigarette?”

“I’m sorry Sally, I’m the Judge, and I rule.”

A bolt of lightning shot out of nowhere, missing the judge by inches. “Sorry,” he corrected himself. “I preside. - Besides, I’m the judge. You cannot object to me.”

“Women can object to anything at anytime, your honour,” said the clerk. “I remember when my wife told me stop, I was left in serious discomfort. I had to go to the bathroom and. . .”

“Overruled!” Moses made to bang his gavel.

Mags cut him off with an evil look.

“Well, I’m a woman,” St Sally McBeal started. “And I have the right to say my piece. One day I’ll be a mother.” She looked to Tiger lovingly, “and . . . and.” She stamped her foot. “I will not stand for all this picking on,

unfairness and bullying.

"Amen to that," said Mary. "By the way Sally, you look kind of rough. Are you unwell?"

"No, just tired. Tiger wanted to do eighteen holes last night. The back nine nearly killed me."

"Lord have Mercy!" exclaimed Mary.

"Lucky bitch. I think I've been missing out." Mags pouted.

"I want my say," demanded Sally.

"She's got to have it," agreed a black man in the gallery. "Go, girl!"

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Bamboozled?" replied Winkle.

Mary gave Moses the look.

"I call Gene Roddenbury to the stand!" suggested Sally.

"He's not here," mumbled Jesus.

"Who?" questioned the Reverend.

"Star Trek guy," Winkle whispered behind his hand.

"Thought so, didn't think he'd be around." Sally flicked her hair. "Where is he?"

"Classified," replied Jesus.

"Really."

"In the interests of Heavenly security, that information is classified." Ruled Moses.

"I wonder why?"

"Why, doesn't matter," said Jesus.

"Funny that." St McBeal let out a little laugh. "This man appears to have vanished. He is neither in heaven nor hell."

"Objection!" boomed Jesus.

"Sustained!" agreed Moses.

"We'll come back to that. The truth is out there, somewhere." The Saint possessed a knowing smile. "Fine, I call Eve to the stand."

Distant thunder rumbles, crowd gasps.

"Nobody cursed. What's with the thunder?" I whispered.

"Mr Bennetton and Eve have, erm – issues." Mary whispered back. "You know how daddies can get when their little girls rebel."

A petite dark haired woman with baby big eyes entered the arena.

"That woman's the double of Liza Minnelli," I said to Winkle.

"Shh!" he hushed me.

"Lisa. . ." St McBeal started.

"It's not Lisa with an S, it's Liza with a Z. Of course it doesn't really matter because my name is Eve! Why do people keep calling me Liza?"

"Sorry, Eve." Sally paused. "Even though you are allowed to return to heaven, you choose to stay

downstairs in hell. Why is that?"

Eve's smile was welcoming, warm and generous. "I just like it down there. It's like one big cabaret." Her huge eyes shone.

"Eve, you have a very famous mother, don't you?" said Sally.

"You could say that."

"And, will you tell the court the name of your mother?"

"Mum."

"Yes, your mum?"

"Mum."

"But what's her name?"

"Mum, I've always known her as mum, everybody knows who my mum is."

"Are you telling me that you don't know your own mother's name?"

"No, some people say she died when I was a baby. The conspiracy theorists have some weird theory that she ran off to Yellowstone Park with some guy called Potter. Yellowstone? Yellowbrick? I'm not too sure, but the guy was an Australian magician, shit-hot apparently, a real wizard."

"Is it possible your mother knew a man named Nick?"

"Nick? My cousin Nicky? The attorney, or the other Nick?"

A low rumble of thunder started.

"Any, Nick, Nicky, whatever. Information on these guys appears to be sketchy at best. Apart from your

cousin Nicky. We know about him. Pesky little man.”

“Of course it's sketchy.” She spoke with a big smile.

The girl's relentless cheerfulness made me feel like I wanted to throw up.

“My dad was burning files with fire and brimstone, left, right and centre.”

The volume of thunder increased as she spoke.

“Why would he want to do that?” asked Sally.

“The same reason he refused DNA tests for me. The second Nick got hold of some results, but he's part the Devil Dynasty, and therefore prone to telling fibs.”

“What did the tests say?”

“That my Dad's not my Dad.”

A gasp emanated from the crowd.

Eve waited for the muttering to die down. “They said that the first Nick was my real Dad.”

A nasty boom of thunder shook the arena.

"But I think he was lying. The certificate of paternity said, *Artwork by Beelzebub*, in the watermark."

"How? . . ."

"Okay, from the top. This is what I remember Nick, not my cousin Nicky, said when he was drunk. This is what has scarred me for life!" Eve wiped her eyes with a tissue she'd produced from up her sleeve. Even though she was crying, she was still smiling. "Before, when up here was one big boring paradise and they had shitty music with harps, and men with small willies, like the statues. Nick, the first Nick, he was my Mum's personal trainer. Apparently, there was way too much rigorous training going on, and it was way too personal. If you get what I mean?" She winked at either me or Winkle. I couldn't tell which. I hoped it was aimed at Winkle. I wanted some of Mags' sexy flesh, as for Eve, she had way too many teeth. I had a flashback of the strawberry flavoured condom episode. I shuddered and thought it better to ignore her and let her carry on speaking.

"Anyway," she continued. "Over dinner my Mum asked my Dad why all men weren't created equal? And why was Nick's todger almost as big as his? My Dad went loopy! My Mum told him Nick tried it on. She said, 'Don't you worry about him, he wasn't man enough for me.' But my Dad wasn't having it. He shut heaven down and threw everybody out."

"Nick's todger wasn't *that* big," interrupted Mags. "David, now his was awesome, scary. I heard he slapped it in Goliath's face, blacked his eye, knocked him clean out, and everything. . ."

"Mags!" Mary snapped at her. "Quit it!"

"I was just saying. . ."

"Well don't! - Sit."

Mary pulled Mags down into a chair and Eve prepared herself for more questions.

"And what happened to your mother?" Sally looked saddened and concerned as she posed her next

question.

“Apparently, the last thing he ever said to her was. 'Don't let the doorknob hitcha on ya way out – biatch!’”

The entire complement of the court sighed in unison.

“Order, order.” Moses tapped his gavel.

Sally approached the witness. “Eve, please continue. And after that?”

“I'm not too sure. Apparently, Nick was pretty fly for a white guy. My Dad. . .” she paused mid-sentence. “I think my Dad invented racism. All I know is that he sent everybody to Earth, but the white folk were given extra punishment. That's when he made the big speech.”

“This one?” Sally produced a piece of paper and read from it . . .

“And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger. Especially those white boys who attempt to smooth-talk and mount my bitch. And you will know I am the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you. ’- Was that the speech?”

“Yeah that sounds about right,” sniffled Eve. “My Dad could be a bad muthafucka. Although, that sounds like the radio edit with all the expletives removed. The original version was at least four or five times as long. It starts; ‘Those fark. . .’”

“Objection!” cried Jesus.

Arbitration

"I think we've heard enough," agreed Moses.

"Nothing further. Your witness," said Sally.

Jesus shook his head.

"Okay." Sally clasped her hands together. "I call Ezeikel to the stand."

"You can't call Ezeikel. You know he's protected by 3rd amendment."

"What 3rd amendment?"

"The 3rd amendment to the Commandments."

Sally screwed up her face in confusion. "There are no amendments to the Commandments."

Moses sighed and waved the legal teams forward. "Approach the bench."

"Well?" Sally raised her eyebrows expectantly.

Moses glanced nervously in the direction of the Virgin Mary.

"I can confirm, there were amendments to the Commandments."

"And?" demanded Sally.

"Ezeikel's such a wanker. That's why he got canned," Mags piped in. "Called himself Chief Editor. The man's a eedjut."

Moses gave Mags a stern look. "Mary Magdalene, if you contravene the Heavenly Secrets Act, I'll have to hold you in contempt."

"Hold me? You? Piss off. You ain't man enough!"

Moses shrugged.

Mags continued. "Ezeikel was an eedjut. He took some Creative Writing course, came back thinking he was

some big shot editor. He said the amendments to the Commandments didn't drive the story on, so he deleted them."

"He did what?" said Jesus.

"Oh, it get's worse. He said the publishers wouldn't publish a book that long, and that the Old Testament was way too much backstory. If God hadn't stepped in – half you guys wouldn't exist."

"I thought it was King James fault," I said, confused.

"No," replied Mary. "It was pretty bugged by the time James got the manuscript. Me and Mags cobbled stuff together but Ezzy had well and truly screwed it up."

"I'm gonna tell 'em. I don't care," said Mags.

"No!" said Mary.

"This immaculate conception 'crock of shite' was Ezeikel. He said he didn't want to alienate the Y/A audience. There were sex-scenes, good ones. He deleted them all."

"Anything else I should know about?" asked Jesus.

"There're tonnes. Now's probably not the time but did you ever wonder why there're ten Commandments but only seven sins. Eziekel, the eejut, red-penned all of that shit. He said nobody would ever try to fly so 'Thou shall not fly' was unnecessary. He removed another Commandment because he didn't want to upset the potential for sales to the gay community. I don't even want to talk about the other stuff."

"I don't get it," said the Reverend.

Jesus frowned. "How many sins and commandments were there then?"

"Twenty of each."

"Twenty! WTF?"

“Yup, it wasn’t just Ezzy though, was it?” Her eyes fixed on Moses. “*Somebody* went up a mountain got involved in some shenanigans with a certain Brenda Summers, did his back in, and couldn’t carry all the stones down.”

“Interesting.” Dr Google sat in the gallery, frantically scribbling notes into his pad.

St Sally McBeal turned her back on Moses and walked away shaking her head. “I think I’m gonna just have to call God.”

ARBITRATION - ACT IV

“You can’t call God, fool,” objected Jesus.

“Bugger,” said Mary. “It’s all gonna kick off now.”

“I can think of a few things I’d like to call God,” said Mags.

"This does not bode well," mumbled Winkle.

"I knew this would come up," said Moses. "I've taken this under advisement."

"Whose advisement?" questioned Jesus.

"The ARB," replied Moses.

"Stuff the ARB!" hissed Jesus.

"Yuck no, they're a bit too old and wrinkly," mused Mags. "Besides, I think most of them might be gay."

"But the ARB ain't here, are they?" I said.

"The ARB turn up when you least expect it," said Winkle, grimacing. "Nobody expects the Apolistic Review Board."

A man dressed in red robes burst into the court. "Nobody expects the Apolistic Review Board! Our chief weapon is surprise. . . surprise and fear. . . fear and surprise." He held two fingers aloft. "Our two weapons are fear and surprise . . . and ruthless efficiency . . ." He looked at his two fingers and quickly added a third. "Our *three* weapons are fear, surprise, and ruthless efficiency . . . and an almost fanatical devotion to the Commandments. . ." He paused, screwed his face, looked at his hand, crossed his thumb, and held up the remaining four fingers. "Our four . . .no. . . *Amongst* our weapons. . . Amongst our weaponry . . .are such elements as fear, surprise . . ."

"Bailiff!" called Moses. "Please escort this gentleman out."

"Who was that crazy man?" I asked.

"That was just Monty, and yes he's totally crazy," replied Winkle.

"Why did he have that snake draped all over him?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you some other time."

"Nice hat," said Mary.

"Wicked," said Mags. "That cross was massive."

"Order!" Moses banged his gavel. "I have referred this to the ARB, and. . ."

"What you listening to them for? - Fool!" Jesus shouted at Moses.

That was the moment Moses stood up and took off his gown. "Who you callin' a fool? - You little dipshit!"

A bell chimed. The cheerleaders grabbed their pom-poms. The band started playing Conti's '*Gonna Fly Now*.'

"No way," I said, as Moses strode out from behind the bench and Jesus cast down his crochet needles.

"Yes way," said Winkle, moving his seat forward next to mine. "This has been brewing for years."

"This is the one everyone wants to see," said Mags, forcing herself into the gap between us. "Popcorn? You guys?" She offered the bag round.

"Moses bomaye! Moses bomaye! Moses bomaye!" the crowd chanted.

"Whatever are they saying?" asked Mary.

"Moses, kill him," replied Winkle.

"Hell no, not now! Not commercials." I cast my eyes to the two guys with the ridiculously big headphones.

"Yup, you know they're gonna cut to commercials anytime soon." Winkle shook his head.

The first of the two guys wearing big headphones spoke into his microphone. "Well Ted, it seems like this could be the clash we think everybody behind the Pearly Gates has been waiting for. Any thoughts, Ted?"

"Yes Ted, this could be the rumble of biblical proportions. A catch-testament contest, a contest nobody ever thought they'd see, not in this lifetime, to be frank with you."

"Lifetime? Ted. We're all dead, Ted."

"Sorry Ted, figure of speech."

"Ted?"

"Yes Ted."

"Who's Frank?"

"Nobody Ted, it's another figure of speech."

"Oh."

"As we were saying. Moses, his awesomeness, champion of the Old Testament will take on Jesus of the new. Yes, the great Jesus, a man defeated only once in a questionable KO decision given to Pontius Pilate."

"I saw it Ted, he was KO'd for sure."

"Nah, he was on the ropes. He was just taking a breather."

"Ted, Pontius always had his guard up. Jab, jab, jab. He caught Jesus with a cross, nailed him, three times. Besides, seven days is a helluva long count."

"Thanks for that Ted, anyway, Jesus is up against it this time. Moses and the old-school just have too much fire-power, too much brimstone, and too much sheer wrath. I don't think Jesus' quick moves and party tricks will save him. He's going to heaven, again."

"I'm with you on that one ,Ted."

"Thanks Ted. We'll back to Heavenly Square . . ."

"Ted?"

"Yes Ted."

"I think it would be better if you were frank with me."

"I am being frank, Ted."

Arbitration

"No, really frank."

"I am, Ted."

"But you should be frank."

"WTF?"

"All I'm saying Ted, is if you were Frank and I was Ted, Ted, people wouldn't get confused because both our names were Ted, Ted."

"Ted?"

"Yes, Ted?"

"Shut up! - We'll be back, after these messages from your local sponsors."

"Ted?"

"What?"

"If you didn't like the name Frank, Ted , I suppose we could call you Bill, Ted."

"Why?"

"Then we'd be Bill and Ted, Ted."

"Changing my name for the benefit of the audience . . . It all sounds a bit bogus to me."

"Well I think it sounds – Excellent!"

"Ted, we're going to commercials . . ."

'Did you die and go to heaven and it wasn't your fault? Here at Payback and Vengeance, we specialise in revenge for the innocent victim. We may not be able to get you your life back but we can make sure that those responsible for your death –

pay. They will burn in hell.

Our fees are secured on your soul, which we may possess if you don't keep up the payments.

Moses and Jesus stood toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose. "If you think you're a man, son, bring it on." Moses puffed out his chest.

"Moses bomaye! Moses bomaye! Moses bomaye!" the crowd's call intensified.

"You're going down," spat Jesus.

"Is that all you've got?" Moses yawned. "I'll bury you."

"And I'll rise again, like I always do."

"Funny, Mags told me different. She said you were a bit of a flop."

"Huh?"

"Ignore him baby," said Mags. "I was talking about the time we went, er, spring-board diving."

"But I've never been diving, I don't like it."

"No, you don't do that - diving, do you?" Mags scowled.

"The boy don't know what it's for?" chuckled Moses.

"Shuddup! Fool!" shouted Jesus.

"Stop it right now, the pair of you!" Mary ran in between the two and pushed them apart. "You." She turned to Moses gesturing with her Samsung GTX3290S camera-phone (c/w Blackberry service). "Do you really want

everybody to know what went on up that mountain, in 32 megapixel digitally enhanced 8x zoom, 30 minute video clip?"

"You wouldn't dare." Moses looked calm under the circumstances.

"My phone-book holds 256,000 numbers and I get free picture messaging, - try me." Her finger hovered over the button.

Moses barely shrugged his shoulders.

"Why does Ann Summers' family tree appear to have no roots? Why were all references to Brenda Summers removed from the Bible by the Apolistic Censorship Board?" She teased him.

"Lady, you win." Moses, dejected, returned to his seat.

"Ha! Fool!" Jesus laughed, pointing to the judge.

CRACK! - Mary cuffed Jesus around the back of his head. "When we get home, my boy, you are grounded." The Virgin Mary led Jesus back to his seat, pulling him by his ear. She turned to the grinning Moses. "Weren't you supposed to be making a judgement, or a ruling, or something?"

"Why women always got put their two-cents in and mess things up?" I said.

"Ain't it the truth," Winkle agreed, shaking his head.

The fight was obviously - off. The crowd grumbled and groaned for a few moments.

Mags snatched back her popcorn.

A man wandered in with a broken tennis racquet. "Anybody wanna play?"

"No!" Jesus and Winkle snapped.

"You can't play here, son," added Moses.

"This is the court at Heavenly Square Gardens, right?"

"This ain't tennis court, fool. It's a court of law."

"Man! You cannot be serious!" He hurled his racket away.

"Oops," I said on hearing a thud, followed by a shriek, followed by silence.

The cheerleader lay on the ground – out cold.

"OUT!" Moses shouted at the tennis player.

"Man, I don't fucking believe this. . ."

A bolt of lightning came out of nowhere, setting the man alight. He ran of into the fog, ablaze, like some kind of human torch, screaming and cussing. Every time he cursed, another bolt rained down.

"You gotta hate it when that happens," said Winkle.

The cheerleader regained consciousness.

Mary helped her to her feet. "Are you okay?"

"Brrr!" She shuddered. "It's cold out here."

Mary placed an arm around her. "Not it's not really, it must be something in the atmosphere."

The cheerleader sprang into life. "Bring it on," she said.

Other cheerleaders joined her. A man with a saxophone starts playing. The arena is filled with dancing cheerleaders.

The band fires up.

“Hear the drummer, get wicked!” Moses shouted, and starts doing some strange old man boogie – like geriatric break-dancing. Some awesome drum-line turns up to accompany the cheerleading display, and there's a couple of white chicks break-dancing out front.

After a couple of minutes Moses shouts. “How about a different style?”

The music changes. All the crowd are up on their feet, cheering and clapping. The Hispanics and the Caribbeans are going ape-shit. Everybody in the gallery is nodding to the music. The Virgin Mary's got that sexy hip swingin' move goin' on, again.

“Y'all ready for this?” Moses screams.

From nowhere there are cheerleaders flying through the air doing some double, triple, back-flip stuff with twists and shit. Skaters are zooming in and out of the cheerleaders and the drum-line. Michael Jordan is jumping up and down like a completely deranged lunatic. Mags, is doing some crazy high kicks, and every time she does the crowd is screaming, “yeah!” I could only stand and marvel at what was a truly awesome spectacle. They *knew* how to put on a show up here.

Some strange brother starts shouting a whole heap of stuff that I don't understand.

“Is that man speaking in tongues?” John asked.

“No,” replied Winkle. “That's just James. He gets like that when he gets his groove on.” He returned a

'thumbs up' sign and shouted. "How y'all doing James?"

"I feel good," came the reply.

The entire black side of the arena is rockin'.

Two white men wearing dark glasses escaped their chains and tried to join in the routine.

"Where do you think you're going?" asked Mary.

"You see, we're on a mission from God," they replied.

Mary sent them packing. "Don't you blaspheme in here! Don't you blaspheme in here! Jesus is my son, and God's my baby father, and you two are gonna turn around and walk right out of here."

Eventually, the routine ended. Moses went back behind the bench, his shirt, covered in sweat. "Give me a moment to catch my breath. . . and. . . Let me clear my throat."

A man stood up in the crown. "All the ladies in the house! If you got real hair? And you got real fingernails . . ."

"Wow, that's just so Kool," I remarked, pointing.

The saxophonist started playing again.

Moses shot all of us a harsh look.

The saxophonist promptly returned to his seat.

The DJ, sat down.

"I wonder if I've still got it?" said Mags, trying to do the splits.

Moses cleared his throat. "Can I get a Amen?"

Arbitration

"No," said Mags. "I'd forgotten about that commandment stuff.

"No," agreed Mary. "You are not worthy."

"Mags, why you got bring that stuff up anyway – it's old shit."

"I'll see if I can get the deleted sex scenes uploaded to Youtube," said Google.

"You'll do no such thing," replied Mary. "The last person who tried . . .

"Order!" called Moses. "St McBeal, can call God on the basis he's already here."

"Damn that omnipresent thing!" cursed Jesus. "Okay, in that case, God's taking the 5th."

"The 5th amendment to the Constitution? Or the 5th amendment to the Commandments," queried St McBeal.

"The Commandments."

"The Commandments don't have five amendments, so there." Mags poked her tongue out at him.

"Okay, the Constitution, then."

"The Constitution we don't have in this paradise of a dictatorship?"

"I don't get it," said John-the-Catholic.

"John, shut up, please. We get that you don't get much. Now sit down!"

"Objection," said Jesus.

"Overruled," replied Moses. "I don't know how the swearing in part is gonna work, though."

"So, God, tell the court. Why do you hate white men?" Sally shouted into the air.

God didn't answer.

Gripped by an invisible force, I involuntarily rose to my feet.

Winkle tried to pull me back down but I was kind of stuck, and entranced. I'd been possessed.

"Mmm. He looks nice and stiff." Mags winked at Winkle.

"Are you representing God?" Moses asked me.

My head nodded – I didn't do it. I had no control.

"Let the record show, Mr Stone, for the purpose of these proceedings, is God."

Silence.

"I will take the lack of thunder as Holy agreement," he stated. "St McBeal, you may proceed."

"Thank you, your awesomeness." She turned to face me. "Let me be more specific." St McBeal walked right up to me. "Why do you hate the English?"

I stood up straighter and tried to look dignified.

"Wow!" said Mags excitedly. "Now that is stiff!"

"One moment," St McBeal seemed irritated as she moved over towards Mags. "Can you stop interrupting please," she said in a condescending tone. "Slapper," she mumbled under her breath as she returned her attention to me.

"I heard that, street-girl." Mags shouted after her.

"Street-girl?" Sally turned back.

"Yeah, you ain't exactly a saint, are you?" Mags was ready to fight. "You're a wanton tramp. That's why they call you street-girl."

"WTF?" Sally shook her head.

Mary pulled Mags back into her seat. "She is a bloody saint, you stupid bugger," she whispered into her ear. "The St. in front of her name stands for saint, not street."

"Oh," said Mags. "My bad."

St McBeal smiled wryly and came back over to question me. "So, are you the one?"

"The Matrix isn't actually real," I replied. "Or did you mean the one, as in. - There can be only one."

"Yes, that - one."

"Well that's the Highlander, it's not me, I'm God."

"That's what I was seeking to ascertain." She looked me squarely in the eye. "So, why *do* you hate white folk."

"I never said that." I replied, unblinking.

"But, you imprisoned and punished them from day one."

"Did not," I replied.

"Did too!" she hissed.

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Pig!"

"Cow!"

"Objection!! Argumentative!" Jesus cut in.

"Sustained!" Moses banged his gavel.

"Okay," she started slowly.

"She's really good," commented the Reverend. "She should turn professional."

"If you didn't hate them," she continued. "Why did you evict them from heaven and put them in such a cold place? A place where it continually rained. Why did you give them white skin? To reflect what little heat there was. Why did you surround them with water, so there could be no escape?"

"Luck of the draw?" I tentatively offered.

"Luck of the draw my backside! You wanted them to suffer! You gave these people, here." She pointed to the heaven side of the arena. "Oranges, bananas, coconuts, chocolate. . ."

"Mmmmm! Chocolate," all the women agreed in unison.

"That marijuana cannabis stuff."

"One love, respect for that." A Rastafarian man pushed his fist against mine. "You have any Rizla?"

"There you go Bob." Winkle passed him a packet of rolling papers.

"What did you give the English? Huh? Apples with maggots, and cows with brain disease? This whole thing stinks of revenge. I will get to the bottom of this."

"Objection!" hailed Jesus. "Conjecture."

"Sustained," agreed Moses.

"But." I held up a finger. "I let them have Broccoli."

Sally drummed her fingers on the bench. "Okay." She decided to change her angle of attack. "When imprisoning the white people. . ."

"Objection," protested Jesus.

"Sustained." Moses yawned.

"Sorry, your awesomeness. I'll rephrase the question. When you exiled the white folk. Did you afford them all the comforts of heaven?"

"There's no place like heaven," I replied.

In the gallery, Eve clicked her heals together three times.

Moses gave her a cold, hard stare.

"Sorry," she replied, the smile still wide. "I think it's from a story mum used to tell me."

"So," Sally continued. "You let them keep all their little luxuries?"

"Yes, of course, why wouldn't I?"

"So they had their beloved tea, in this place of exile?"

"No, but. . ."

"They had coffee though, right?"

"Not exactly."

"Did they even have sugar?"

"No."

"Surely a few spuds, so they could make chips? Or have bangers and mash."

"No."

"How about a few spices to make a good curry?"

"No."

"We've already established that you denied them citrus fruits. They could have bananas, surely?"

"No."

"Coconuts? Mangos? Kiwi fruit, perhaps."

"No! No! No!"

"Nuts?"

"No, I knew exactly what I was doing."

"I meant nuts, as in peanuts."

"No."

"Cashew nuts? Pistachio nuts? Walnuts?"

"No! No! No!"

"What, were these people supposed to starve?"

"Let them eat cake." I smirked.

The crowd chuckled.

"I've always wondered what spotted dick tastes like." Mags mumbled.

"Me too," said Mary.

Sally ignored them. "How about some grapes for a bottle of wine with their tasteless meal?"

"No."

"Tobacco for a cigarette afterwards?"

"No."

"You hated those people didn't you?"

"They can't be trusted!" I screamed. "They're thieving, warmongering troublemakers, every last one of the

murdering bastards!"

"I take it you haven't forgiven them then? - Withdrawn." Sally walked away holding her hand up, turned, and fired another question.

"I think Gene Roddenbury's missing, because he got too close. The answer's out there somewhere." She pondered.

"Objection, speculative." Jesus shook his head in dismay.

"Sustained," sighed Moses. "Ms McBeal, can you kindly refrain from speculating, and actually ask some questions."

"Sorry, your awesomeness. God, did you? Or did you not, punish all white people for the situation between Nick and your wife?" she fired the question.

Thunder boomed.

I felt my body relax without warning. Winkle grabbed me to keep me from falling.

I was dispossessed. "I think he's done here," I said. "I don't think he'll be answering anymore questions today." I tried to smile at everybody. "He did mention something about Noah, though." "Noah? Who's Noah?" asked Sally.

"Gimme a sec." I massaged my temples. "I ain't never done one of those pointy-eared mind meld things before."

"That seems – logical. Take your time," said Moses.

"Got it. Yes, he did imprison the white folk. Yes, he wanted them to suffer. But, no. He didn't take into

account that some cantankerous meddling hippie '*save the planet*' fool called Noah, would invent a boat. If Noah had patented the damn design, those people wouldn't have copied it, escaped from the island, and subsequently sailed around the world wreaking havoc, and stealing people's shit."

"Moses, your awesomeness," Mags interrupted. "We're wasting time here. He ain't gonna let that rabble . . ." She pointed to the white side of the arena. ". . . back in our place."

"Whatever I rule . . ." Moses started.

Thunder boomed, lightning flashed.

Moses shifted in his seat. "Whatever I decide . . . will be enforced by the ARB, and as this is an appeal, there can be no appeal."

He did it again, dammit, invaded me. I suffered a full body erection. "Stuff the ARB. I rule!" I turned to the white side of the arena. "You scum are never coming in."

"Move to strike," objected Winkle.

"I'll strike you in a minute," I replied. "See if I don't kick your skinny white butt out of heaven, too."

"Mistrial! Mistrial!" screamed Winkle.

Mags sniffed the air. "I'd shut up if I were you."

Moses sniffed too, and ducked under his bench.

Winkle continued. "You can't tell me . . ."

"Incoming!" Mags dived across and pulled Winkle out of the way. A burning ball of fire ignited the ground

where he'd been standing. "Hmm, brimstone. I just love that smell."

Mary wagged her finger at me. "Quit it."

"They're not coming in. I hate them!" I boomed.

"Ah, so you admit your prejudice," said Moses, standing and dusting down his robes.

"Prejudice, means to prejudge. I've based my decision on past evidence. They are no good. I threw them out of heaven, gave them the earth, they messed it up. They're faulty. I should destroy them all."

All the prisoners in the orange boiler suits ducked.

Mags sniffed the air a couple of times. "I think you're okay. I don't think he meant he was gonna do it right this second."

I continued. "I don't need to do shit, they destroy everything. It's in their nature."

"What did they do that was that bad?" asked the Reverend.

The whole arena was instantly transformed. Mags suddenly donned a synchronised swimming smile, a purple and yellow feather plume on her head, sparkling silver six-inch high heels, and a sequined basque. John-the-Catholic was transformed into a game-show host with silver hair and white glistening teeth.

Mary and Winkle stood shoulder to shoulder, expectant and excited.

John-the-Catholic opened an envelope. "Mr and Mrs Von Trollope, your final question. You are guaranteed to win one of tonight's star prizes." A spotlight lit-up a car. Mags draped herself suggestively over the bonnet.

“Or . . .” A giant plasma screen appeared, images of every holiday resort on earth scrolled, Mags appeared in every shot, wearing a bikini. “. . . the holiday of a lifetime!”

The crowd gasped with excitement.

“Are you ready for your question?”

Mary nodded enthusiastically.

“Yes please!” Winkle rubbed his hands together and then slipped an arm around Mary’s waist.

The arena darkened and God’s voice boomed. “Well?”

“He hasn’t asked the question,” objected Winkle.

He’d left my body. I was able answer. “I think he did ask the question.”

“We didn’t hear him,” said Winkle. “Did anybody hear him?”

The crowd looked at one another, mumbling and shaking their heads.

“The question was; how do you want to increase your carbon footprint, deplete the earth’s resources and pollute the planet? All at once, with your massive holidays, or daily, with your vehicles? It’s in your culture, cars and holidays, you love ‘em.

“I’m out of here,” the voice boomed.

“Well, what do you want do to now, Ms McBeal. I can't exactly hold the Lord God in contempt now can I?”

said Moses.

"I'm not Ms McBeal," said Sally.

Moses sighed. "He hasn't possessed you now, has he?"

"No, he hasn't." St Sally took a couple of paces, stopped, turned, and smiled. "Well, we didn't want to say anything until after the trial." She glanced over to Tiger, sitting quietly in his golfing attire. Her loving look, looked particularly sheepish and girly. "I'm not Ms McBeal anymore!" She showed her wedding ring around, her face a look of gleeful pride.

"Ahh!" All the women in the crowd sighed as one.

"I'm Mrs Tiger now! I will, of course be keeping my sainthood, and will remain St McBeal for professional purposes." she added.

Mary, yawned and accentuated a roll of her eyes. "Fidelity, and the tiger do not lay well together. It'll all end in tears."

"Thank you for sharing your joy with the court Ms . . . St McBeal. But can we get back to the business in hand?"

"Yes, your honour. I have nothing further."

"Well sit down, Mrs Tiger."

"Objection," cried St McBeal.

"You want to object to yourself?"

"Can I object to her?" mumbled Mary.

“Er no, I have a question, sorry,” said Sally.

“Well ask it! Damn it!”

Thunder.

“I’m Mrs Tiger? Who’s Mrs God?”

Another rumble of thunder shook the ground.

“I want to call Mrs God,” insisted Sally.

“Oh, Shit!” said Winkle.

“Girlfriend, don’t go there honey.” For some reason Mary was speaking as if she were a black woman, smoking an extremely large roll-up and standing next to the Rastafarian named ‘Bob.’

“Was it something to do with you? Are you a home-wrecker?” asked Sally.

“Watcha talking about, biatch?” said Mary.

“Yeah, I get it,” I said. “Mary, technically speaking, you’re God’s baby-mother. And if he was married to Mrs God at the time, then thou shall not commit adultery comes in to play.”

“Objection!” cried Jesus.

“I was just thinking. Now I’m a married lady and Mrs God’s a married lady, perhaps we can do lunch.” Sally smiled pathetically.

“Why do have a feeling this will not end well?” John-the-Catholic made the sign of the cross.

“Even if we can't find out who she is? There remains the question of, where she is?” Mags voiced her thoughts.

Thunder rocked the arena. A breeze began to blow.

“Oops,” said Winkle. “I have a very bad feeling about this.”

“Me too, big, huge oops,” I agreed.

“It doesn't matter!” shouted Jesus as the wind began to howl.

“What is it with you and this, doesn't matter - stuff. Everything that I say, every little piece of evidence, doesn't matter, according you. What are you? Anti-matter.” Sally hissed.

“Leave it!” demanded Jesus.

“Girlfriend, quit it, it doesn't matter,” Mary begged her.

The wind began to blow harder. Hailstones rained down.

“Are you anti-matter too? What's with you Mary? Are you with him on this whole, suppress evidence, anti-matter campaign. Well it matters to me! I stand for things the matter! All of you lot are – anti-matter bastards.”

“Sally, some things just don't matter,” said Jesus.

“Anti-matter!” she jeered at him childishly.

“No!” Jesus begged her.

“What? Did Mrs God run off with some English. . .”

"Sally! Don't say it!" screamed Mary.

A great blast of thunder rocked the arena again, knocking people off their feet.

"You lot are so anti-matter, well it matters to me - dammit!" Sally shouted to make her voice heard over the force ten gale.

"Sally!" Jesus shouted, holding on to a table in the fierce wind. "Leave it, you win. This matter / anti-matter stuff is getting us nowhere."

"I knew I'd win!" cackled St McBeal" All this matter / anti-matter stuff. It doesn't really matter, does it?" She extended a hand.

"We are adjourned!" Moses banged his gavel furiously, rose from his seat and ran off into the fog.

"I thought the Pope was coming," said John-the-Catholic.

"Fuck him." Winkle dived under a table.

"What should I do?" I asked. "This is all looking kind of fucked up!"

"You wanna be a hero?" Winkle peered out from under the table and looked around. "Save the cheerleader."

"Well done St Sally, you win." Jesus conceded and fought his way over to shake hands.

"Theoretically!" Dr Google shouted over the howling wind.

We'd all forgotten about him. I got closer so I could hear what he had to say.

"If he's anti-matter, and she's a representative of matter, those two shouldn't really touch. It could cause. . ."

KABOOM!!

Last thing remember was the bang. It was a really big bang! Next thing, me, Winkle and the Reverend are in the middle of nowhere. And my ears are ringing like a bitch.

“We may as well try that way,” Winkle said, after we’d all picked ourselves up and dusted ourselves off. It seems like we walked for miles. I got bored.

“Well Rev.” I grabbed the book out of his hand. “I see you’ve managed to keep your faith.”

“That book, it’s not mine,” objected the Reverend. “That Mary woman slipped it to me when everybody was arguing.”

“Oh well,” I read the cover. “*The Hitch-hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, I’ll read anything.”

Two alien children sit at a table, playing a board game.

“Why you always got do that every time your losing?” The elder one picks pieces up from around the room. “You always chuck the whole lot around the place! Every time you’re losing. What’s wrong with you?”

The younger hangs his head and turns over his bottom lip.

“Don’t worry little G,” the elder reassures him. “We’ll play ‘Universe’ again tomorrow. Mum’s called us for dinner anyway.”