

Jesus of Detroit

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- [ACT I](#)
 - [Crucifixion](#)
 - [The Church](#)
 - [The Mosque](#)
 - [Jesus, The Black](#)
 - [The Savior](#)
 - [Crystal](#)
 - [The Miracle](#)
- [ACT II](#)
 - [Omar](#)
 - [The Apostles](#)
 - [Maria](#)
 - [O Brother, Where Art Thou?](#)
 - [When Mary Met Sally](#)
 - [In the Wrong Place At the Wrong Time](#)
 - [Echoed Whispers](#)
 - [Waves of Compassion](#)
 - [Mr. Morgan](#)
 - [Messiah Show](#)
 - [It Is On](#)
 - [This Is War](#)
 - [In Morgan We Trust](#)
 - [Religions United](#)
 - [And God Created Common Sense](#)
 - [Karma](#)
 - [The Church, Take 2](#)
 - [Carousel](#)
 - [Name the Price](#)
 - [Unforgiven](#)
- [ACT III](#)
 - [Ascension](#)
 - [The Last Goodbye](#)
 - [There Will Be Blood](#)
 - [Thou Shalt Not Kill](#)
 - [The End](#)
 - [Redemption](#)
 - [Resurrection](#)

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ACT I

Crucifixion

Crucified on the cross, Jesus' black skin sharply contrasts with the blue sky above him. This marks the end of an old tragedy. Or it could be the beginning of a fresh one. The last drops of blood fall from the nail that is driven through his right hand. Jesus is gone, but his sacrifice will inspire compassion and love for many generations to come. Especially love. Especially love.

His hand trembles. Jesus is still alive! The nail shakes when his fingers bend and form a black fist. His soul is not ready yet to let go and fly away to the skies above.

With his head tilted down, the furious gaze of Holy Jesus is glued to the earth, bearing witness to something unholy, unjust. Something that diminishes the unthinkable atrocity of crucifying Jesus Christ to just another forgivable sin. Something unforgivable. Only a few feet below his toes, the devil himself is plotting the most heinous deed yet, using all his powers to bring about a development so wicked that no man could withstand. Not even crucified Jesus Christ.

Below the cross stands a young, beautiful woman with wisps of red hair poking out from under her white headscarf. Her charming smile and dark skin give her the appearance of an innocent angel sent directly from heaven. There is a light in her eyes that speaks to the chastity of her heart. A sinless heart. A heart so pure that could inspire love wherever it sets. No wonder in the last moments of his life Jesus' eyes are on her. But why with fury? Why would Jesus, who embodies compassion and forgiveness, be enraged at an innocent woman?

The beautiful woman offers a flirtatious smile. The subject of her flirtation, however, is a Roman soldier, a handsome man with an athletic body and long blond hair. His eyes betray a repulsive lustfulness that she seems to ignore, basking in the satisfaction of his attention. Using her white ribbon, she kindly attends to the wound on the soldier's hand. 'Wound' is too much of a word though; it is more like a small scratch on the tip of his middle finger.

While his right hand reaches toward the pretty woman, the soldier still rests his left hand on the cross, which is soaked red from blood. Does she not see that he has Jesus' blood on his hand? Some drops of blood also drip on her white headscarf, each carrying with it the pain of Jesus. If the droplets could speak, every one of them would scream, 'Look at me. I'm right here.' But she doesn't notice them. Or perhaps she does and conveniently ignores them. All her attention is on treating the scratch on the extended middle finger of the Roman soldier. Could Jesus ever forgive him for the crucifixion? Yes, he could. Or yes, he should. After all, this is Jesus Christ. But could Jesus ever forgive her?

The fury in Jesus' eyes becomes wilder and wilder.

The soldier rests on his cross. Jesus' cross.

The woman keeps treating his wound. Jesus' the soldier's wound.

An uncontrollable rage burns in Jesus' eyes.

The soldier licks his lips.

The woman grins.

Jesus clenches his teeth.

THUNDER strikes! And half the Roman soldier's face turns black.

Untouched by the lightning, the young woman is still smiling at him.

Another bolt of THUNDER strikes, this time mixed with a furious scream. The soldier's face is now fully engulfed in blackness.

Time freezes in the fictional world of the painter, the absurdity of its scene captured on the canvas. While thundering at the Roman soldier in the painting, he hits the canvas with his brush harder and harder until it tears.

The painter's scream gradually turns into a pitiable sobbing. The brush drops from his hand, and he himself falls to his knees, his head hitting the palette that has fallen on the ground. He rolls and lies on his back as he is still crying. The rainbow painted on his black face now reflects all the colors of mankind; white on his forehead, yellow on his nose, and brown and red on each of his shaved cheeks.

His name is Jesus. A Black man from Generation Z.

"God, how can I ever forgive you?" Jesus says with excruciating pain. He looks up at the canvas torn around the Roman soldier. He then looks at the portrayal of himself in the painting, innocently crucified like Jesus Christ, for a sin none other than being in love. And then he turns his look down to the young woman below the cross. She still has the flirtatious smile on her face. The smile, however, no longer looks innocent.

"God, how can I ever forgive you?" Jesus repeats in agony.

The Church

“Would God ever forgive me?” ginger-haired Ruth begs, a tone of hope detectable in her trembling voice. With a heart rusted with sin and hardened with guilt, she has sought refuge in the house of forgiveness, i.e., the most glorious church in the state.

As Father Kelly hears the question, the second hand on his decade-old, 2012-model Sky-Dwellers Rolex moves to IX. Time moves slowly in the cramped space of the confessional, which reeks of rotten wood. The first thing he should do next time he raises a sizable donation is order a new confessional for His Church, perhaps one made of Cedar and Pine. Until then, he will endure the discomfort. After all, the half-Irish, half-German pastor didn't devote most of the 54 years of his life to the church just to gain comfort. Once a young teen with long, blond hair, full of passion and love, he is now partly bald, having lost a hair for each hour that he has served in His Church. Despite this, Father Kelly has no regrets. He is here to help people and serve God. And God knows he has served Him well. If only more people were appreciative of his sacrifice too.

Father Kelly leans in, and the silver cross necklace that rests on his black Wool-Cashmere clergy jacket dangles from his neck. Through the latticed opening that divides his compartment from that of the confessor, he catches a glimpse of Ruth. Her red hairs are soon to be outnumbered by the gray ones. Tears streak down her wrinkled face, revealing the sincerity of her repentance. Her soul is now in the hands of Father Kelly, whether or not to absolve her of her sins and most importantly to free her of her guilt.

Would God ever forgive her? Leaning back to his seat, Father Kelly takes a deep breath before responding. “Well—”

“You don't need God's forgiveness,” a mysterious voice that fills up the whole church interrupts Father Kelly.

His teeth clench when he recognizes the voice of the devil.

“You're the one who should forgive God. Come. Come, my victim friends. Come join me outside, and let's forgive God for...” —The assertive voice dissolves into a pitiful sob— “...for what He has done to us.”

How dare they bring their blasphemy into the place of worship, the house of God? There was a time, not so long ago, that the church could light a fire into the ass of these agents of Satan. A literal fire. But, times sure have changed—for better or worse. This is the era of diplomacy and patience. Father Kelly hears himself panting through his nose. Taking a deep breath, he tries to suppress his anger and wrap up with his routine by absolving Ruth of all her sins in a few seconds.

With a voice that carries the generosity of his spirit, he kindly responds, “Of course He—”

Ruth steps out of the booth.

Disappointed and puzzled, Father Kelly draws the curtain open.

Ruth joins the flock of churchgoers who are going *out* of the church, walking like mindless zombies hypnotized by the devil's voice.

“Damn,” Father spits. His barely-contained anger reaches a boiling point, turning into an uncontainable blaze. “Jesus, you Black son of a bitch,” he barks, and pulling himself up by the curtain, he storms out of the confession booth. Leaving the curtain partly torn down, he

shoves his way through the crowd to outside the church, where the devil's voice emanates from.

As Father Kelly leaves the church, he pushes through the congregation gathered in the churchyard. His assistant, 22-year-old Otto, is already at the front, watching Black Jesus with passion and curiosity.

Black Jesus was a nickname coined by Father Kelly not to mistake him with Jesus Christ, who was certainly not Black—as proven by the many portraits hung in the church.

Once one of the few Black parishioners of the church, walking the straight line of righteousness, a few years ago Black Jesus took a left turn and ever since has become increasingly distant from His Church. Until now that he has gone too far, crossed the line to the devil's side, shamelessly and openly rebelling against Father Kelly and ~~his church~~ His Church.

Black Jesus stands with open arms on a blue open-top trash can across the sidewalk, his feet resting on the rim. His new, untrimmed beard makes him look more like an orthodox Jew, or a Muslim, but definitely no longer a good, God-fearing Christian. Traces of multiple fresh burns mar his face and hands. Half of his beard and part of his hair also appear burnt as if he's returned from a vacation in Hell, where the devil has taught him all his tricks. With tears streaming down his face, he screams the words in such agony as if they might come from deep inside him. He portrays a convincing mental patient. The devil has apparently taught him acting too—among other dark arts.

Enraged and irritated, Father Kelly growls, "That crosses every line of decency," and prays for God's intervention to save his church from this madman on the trash can.

Black Jesus' feet shake.

Father Kelly smiles.

Black Jesus is quite unstable and might fall into the garbage bin any second now. It just needs a little push.

Stroking his chin, Father Kelly contemplates whether he should finish God's job on His behalf. The more Black Jesus talks, the madder Father Kelly gets. He is like a barrel of gunpowder that only needs a small spark to fire off and unleash himself on Black Jesus.

"Pray no more, my children," Black Jesus says. "Time to answer God's prayers. Time to forgive. Let's forgive Him for the pain and agony that we are born into."

That's it, Father Kelly thinks, marching toward Black Jesus with clenched fists when a dark shadow casts itself on him. His face is a foot away from the gold chain that rests on the chest of the man blocking his way. Father Kelly slowly looks up.

That is Paul, a former altar boy, a longtime friend of Jesus, now standing by his side. He has grown tall and strong, his childhood cute face hardened with a frozen expression of vengeance. The playful kitty has grown to a predatory leopard, evolved to tear flesh. Standing tall with crossed arms, Paul nonchalantly chews gum while shooting menacing glares down at Father Kelly.

His eyes locked on Paul, Father Kelly backs into Otto.

"Sorry, Father," Otto says.

With his heart pounding fast, Father Kelly turns back and looks at Otto.

Clueless Otto, still clinging on to the naive innocence of his teenage years, looks back as if he has not felt the storm that is about to reshape the religious landscape of the city.

In his head, Father Kelly counts to ten to regain his temper. He stops at six. He swallows, and clearing his throat to make sure his voice will not tremble. "We need to do something about this son of a bitch."

"But he's harmless," Otto says while pointing to Black Jesus.

As Father Kelly turns to face Black Jesus, his gaze falls instead on Paul's extended hand, who is flipping him off. That middle finger is going to hurt somebody real bad, sooner or later. *This is just the beginning*, Father Kelly thinks and he turns back to Otto. "Yeah, at first, when they're only a few. Harmless and even kind of cute. But the harm starts when the cult grows big. And this asshole is set to grow enormous."

"You want me to call the sheriff?"

"No, that wouldn't do," Father Kelly replies, stroking his chin.

"So Imam Zahid again?"

"We need to do something worse. Something much, much worse."

With his eyes narrowed, Otto stands on his toes while leaning in, his ear now near Father Kelly's mouth.

"Call his mom," Father Kelly whispers the secret plan, and pushing the crowd around, goes back inside his church.

Otto is left there with a puzzled look on his face. "His mother!" he mutters.

The Mosque

Imam Zahid surveys the crowd. Many hundreds of devout eyes are laser-focused on him, none blinking. God has blessed him with the gift of being a great public speaker, and now is the perfect time to use his talents for good.

Sitting on top of a 12-foot-tall pulpit in the grand mosque of the city, Imam Zahid performs Friday's sermon. His Oud perfume is not strong enough to cover the smell of the rotten wood that the decade-old pulpit is reeking of. The first thing he should do next time he raises a sizable donation is order a new pulpit for His Mosque, perhaps one made of Cedar and Pine. Until then, he can endure it for the sake of his faith. After all, he did not climb the ladders of success so quickly through ease and peace. It takes hard work and dedication for a 43-year-old man to become the Imam of the grand mosque on Elysian Boulevard. If his all-gray beard was not shaved, it would testify to the difficult days that he has gone through. The few gray hairs sticking out of the thick, brown mole that shines out on his big, white cheek reveal that fact anyway.

Rearranging his Ray-ban glasses, it pains Imam Zahid to look down at his audience sitting on the carpeted floor. The grand mosque, which on Fridays was always packed solid with Muslim prayers of all races and all colors, is now barely half full, of which only a small portion is young. Imam Zahid is deeply concerned about the recent developments. If the trend continues, he will end up performing the Friday sermons only for himself and perhaps a few elderly people on their way to the cemetery. Being their spiritual leader, this is his moral responsibility to save his followers and haul them back to his path of righteousness.

Taking a deep breath, he continues, his voice loud and assertive. "Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—has warned us already; That, Shirk or polytheism, when it approaches you, disguises itself; becomes less visible than a black ant walking on a black stone in the black of the night." While rearranging his glasses again, he scans the crowd and gives them a few seconds for the last sentence to sink in. "A black ant walking on a black stone. That is how invisible Shirk is. What should the believer do? Be vigilant, always, at all moments. Satan is everywhere, and we have to reject him when he attempts to break our faith. That is what Satan's after. Your faith. Yet, I hear some young believers, unfortunately, take this matter of utmost importance lightly. They've let Satan rob them of their faith. They follow the vibe, or vibrant, or... I don't know whatever teens say these days..."

The audience laughs at Imam Zahid's humor, except for Omar, who is listening to the sermon intently. He takes Friday sermons seriously; very seriously; probably more so than Imam Zahid himself. Omar has in his heart the innocence and stubbornness typical of a teen his age. He has shaved his mustache but has let the beard grow very long. He would have looked more handsome without it; everybody tells him that. The recently shaved head does not help him look nicer either. He does not mind, for he is not a girlish wuss who tries to look cute for women.

"They follow trendy nonsense," Imam Zahid says, "blasphemies of this Jesus guy, a Black con artist. Subhanallah! Subhanallah! A black ant on a black stone. The prophet has warned

us already, but would you listen to the prophet of God or would you listen to a Black con artist who is not even schooled in faith?—who does not know the first thing about religion.”

Imam Zahid continues, his raised voice increasing Omar’s heartbeat. “Vallah, Vallah, no one enters heaven unless they believe in prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—and follow him fully and completely. That’s what being a true believer means. That is faith,” he states authoritatively while pointing his hands up, toward the ~~blue sky~~ sky-blue ceiling. “They say ‘but I’m doing good deeds,’” he says mockingly. “This is not what we will be asked in the other world,” he shouts.

What will I be asked in the other world? Omar remembers his ultimate question in life. His hearing keener than ever, he zooms in on Imam’s mouth.

With his lips pressed together, Imam Zahid pauses for a moment. And another. And another.

Omar’s heartbeat reaches its peak; feeling even his goosebumps.

“On judgment day,” Imam Zahid says finally, “when you are facing the hellfire, God will ask you ‘Did you believe in my prophet? Did you follow his tradition?’ No, then Hell is prepared for the deniers no matter how many good deeds they have brought with them.” Turning his face from side to side, Imam Zahid scans the crowd as if he is searching for the chosen one; one who is strong enough to act as the fist of God. He pauses when his gaze falls on Omar.

Is he looking at me, Omar wonders and squints his eyes. He gulps, submerging in the hypnotizing gaze of Imam Zahid. As if the gaze is pulling him through the space, Omar feels closer and closer to Imam Zahid until he sees Imam Zahid sitting before him face to face, giving him a private sermon.

“Brothers,” Omar hears the singular noun and the word penetrates deep into his heart. “Vallah, Vallah, whoever follows this Black agent of Satan is an apostate, and on the judgment day will have no place but in Hell.”

Like school kids rushing out of the classroom when the recess bell rings, the believers left the mosque the moment Imam Zahid’s fiery sermon was finished. But not Omar. For Omar, there is no recess from religion. Religion is life, and life is religion. He has too much respect for Imam Zahid to let his words be gone with the wind. He stays in the mosque, sitting with Frank, a middle-aged blond Caucasian with a long beard—which is the hard proof that he is a true devotee—and Ali, a young man of Omar’s age who speaks broken English with a thick Arabic accent.

Frank did not tell much about Ali when he introduced him a few minutes ago. They probably have just met too. Omar has mixed feelings about Ali. His beard is too short to be considered a serious beard. It is more like a stubble. Its top is also completely shaved off. Omar suspects people do that to open a landing platform for kisses on their cheeks. Ew! Omar shall have a little chat with him after their dialogue with Frank finishes. ‘Monologue’ is actually a better-suited word since Frank does most of the talking.

“Sermon after sermon after sermon, and nobody does a damn thing.” Sitting with crossed legs, Frank looks left and right as if he is concerned one might be eavesdropping.

He leans in and whispers, "If this isn't Jihad then what is? This *is* Jihad, but it takes guts, and not everybody has them. You get what I'm saying?"

Omar nods.

Ali does not.

Frank continues anyway. "It's time to act." He leans back again, checking the surroundings. His eyes goggle as if his gaze has fallen on a houri sent from heaven. Like a crouching tiger lurking for his prey, he hunches up, pushing his hands against the carpet.

Imam Zahid is leaving, walking through the people who are scattered around the mosque. Putting his right hand across the chest while slightly bowing his head, he humbly returns the salutes when people stand up before him.

Frank jumps up when Imam Zahid passes by them. "As-salamu Alaykum," Frank salutes in an overly enunciated way, attracting everyone's attention.

Lucky Frank! Omar tells himself, jealous of Frank getting to be eye-to-eye with Imam. Who knows? God willing, Imam Zahid might even shake his hand.

The moment Imam Zahid's gaze falls on Frank, his face twists into an expression of disdain. With his nose wrinkled, he turns away and responds to the salute of another Muslim on the other side.

What's going on between those two?! Omar wonders. It must be because Frank missed the Friday sermon last week. Or because he no longer participates in the mosque's charity programs to provide care for elderly veterans. Or perhaps it was just a big misunderstanding. Imam Zahid must have mistaken Frank with someone else.

Frozen to the spot, Frank's gaze is glued to Imam Zahid walking away, leaving him in utter humiliation.

Poor Frank! Omar thinks.

Frank finally snaps out of it and rolls his eyes around at the witnesses of his embarrassing moment. Most have already gone back to chatting with their friends. A few are still watching him, one even with a smirk.

Poor Frank! Omar thinks.

After taking a couple of deep breaths, Frank turns and sits back with Omar and Ali, except that Ali is no longer there. He must have sneaked out the moment Frank lost face. "Whatever," Frank mutters and sits right in front of Omar, his face blank as if nothing has happened. His tone as confident as before, he continues, "As I was saying, it's time to act, and it takes real men, ah... I mean a real man, to do it." He extends his hand, showing his palm. "This Black Kafir shall be stopped, one way or another."

Omar looks at the invitation for the handshake. He has a tough decision to make. A decision that only the ones with an unbreakable faith are strong enough to make. After all, once upon a time this Black Kafir was a good friend. Perhaps no longer a friend, but he is still a good person. Omar is mad at Jesus for putting him in this difficult position. More than that, he is mad at himself. If only he had managed to bring Jesus to the path of righteousness earlier, before he completely lost his mind, rambling blasphemous nonsense. If only.... Never mind. It is too late now anyway. Jesus has crossed the line to the other side, making himself worthy of God's wrath. The fact that Jesus is a nice person is irrelevant. Omar's hands are tight when God wants Jesus stopped.

Omar comes to attention when Frank's face splits into a wide grin. Apparently he is shaking Frank's hand. Poor Jesus, Omar thinks.

Jesus, The Black

He doesn't like to be called Black Jesus. It is racist. Jesus of Nazareth was a middle-eastern Jew, so he was definitely dark-skinned if not Black. This blue-eyed blondie whose pictures were hung in the church is more likely to be Constantine's cousin than Jesus Christ, the savior of mankind.

For a while, he got his friends to call him Jesus of Detroit, but the nickname did not catch on, either because it was too long or because he had never been to Detroit. It doesn't matter anymore. Some shallow clowns make fun of his name once in a while. No big deal. "I am Jesus Christ," he would tell them, "resurrected to save your funny ass from more abuse," and they would shut up.

His palette and canvas under his arm, he approaches his usual evening spot, a willow tree at the edge of the cliff in Eden Adventure Park where he works. A painter by evening and a zip line operator by day, Jesus is a skinny 33-year-old Black man of average height. Average is the word that describes most of his traits, except his ambition. He has in him what it takes to do something big one day. Something that will fill people with awe. "Who's that awesome guy?" they will ask. "The name's Jesus," he would reply to her. "He was with you, and yet you didn't recognize ~~him~~ him."

Forget about Sally, Jesus tells himself and kicks a broken branch out of his way. He needs a distraction to chill again. Something positive. Someone showing love and admiration for who he really is. God bless social media!

With his free hand, he brings out his beaten-up Samsung phone and wakes it. The notification shows three missed calls, all from Mom. Aargh! Jesus clears them and instead goes directly to Twitter, opening his own last Tweet. It is the picture of his recent painting, the portrait of himself crucified on the cross. Dang! Only two people have liked it so far. Jesus refreshes the page, just in case. The number of likes does not improve.

On Twitter, Jesus has 15 followers, two of which are spam accounts. He can tell since neither have any followers and also because of their suspicious account names: SexyRose193 and HotChick942. There are at least 941 other creative bots out there who could not think of a name better than HotChick. The two spam accounts are the only ones that ever like Jesus' tweets, each time almost immediately after he posts them. Jesus does not block them because...well, because 15 followers are still better than 13, even if some of them are fake.

Jesus refreshes the page again. The number of likes on his last painting is still two.

Painting is his only joy in this world. It eases the pain like no other drug can. Especially when it is from a wound that is deep, old, and rotten, and Jesus has had one of those for ten years now. He picked up painting shortly after Sally dumped him. Starting off by painting his father, the first paintings depicted a strong, tall Black man with serious, yet kind, eyes. That is how his mother, Maria, had described him. All Jesus had to do was fill the missing bits and pieces with his imagination, which turns out to have no limits. Over time, the portrait of his father in his next paintings became more and more godlike. Under the post of the most recent one on Twitter, a follower has commented, 'Is it a Greek god? Why black?!' How come Greek gods are never Black? Or how come Indian gods are never Japanese? How

come Greek gods never party with Indian gods? Are gods racist too? These are the questions that his godlike father could have answered if he was still around.

His father passed away before he was born, according to the tales Maria has repeated over the years about his faceless father. How no picture could be left of a man in the 21st century, is a unsolved mystery. Not even one photo from their wedding! The contradictory explanations that Maria gave him were never convincing enough. Such lies that Maria has fabricated over the years. Whatever happened to the ninth commandment: thou shall not bear false witness? So many questions, yet not a single convincing answer. Who knows? His father might be even still alive. Perhaps Maria hides the pictures so that Jesus would not recognize him. He might be a famous person; or even a celebrity.

Immersed in his thoughts, Jesus strokes his shaved cheeks as if they are covered by a beard. Why did he do that?! For some reason he was picturing himself with a long beard, half of it burnt in a deadly fire. Weird! Having been well shaved ever since puberty kicked in, he cannot even imagine that one day he would grow a beard so long that it could be stroked. Was it *deja vu*? He hopes not. No one awaits a future where they are burnt or crucified.

Jesus remembers the portrait of himself crucified on the cross, which he holds under his right arm. The canvas is still torn around the face of the Roman soldier. The beautiful woman in the painting, however, is still intact, although the furious eyes of the crucified Jesus are not taken off her yet. This evening, he wants to try the painting again without, however, the same violent ending. What should be changed in the picture? The Roman soldier, the red-haired, beautiful woman, or his own unforgiving look.

The phone vibrates. The notification bar says, "TheTrueGod666 replied to your tweet." Pumped with excitement, Jesus taps the notification. The Twitter app opens, showing the replied text: 'LET IT GO!!!'

Let it go! Jesus mutters, puzzled and at the same time curious. He opens the sender's profile on Twitter, which says: 'You know me.' The account has zero followers. What a loser! It might even be a spam account. Nevertheless the message of the reply kind of makes sense. Spam accounts usually reply with nonsense.

Jesus is staring at the 'LET IT GO!!!' text when a like appears below it. And another. And another. In a short time, all the Jesus followers like the reply—except for the two spam accounts of course. One even replies with a GIF of Princess Elsa from the Frozen movie singing the Let It Go song. That gets Jesus to ponder. "Let...it...go," he mutters. He joins his followers and likes the reply to his tweet. "Let it go-o-o," he sings and looks up at the image of his painting in the tweet. "Let it go-o-o-o."

What should Jesus change in the painting? An idea! *I gotta let it go. I should be able to forgive; that's what Jesus would do*, Jesus thinks. But whom should he forgive?

The soldier?

The pretty woman?

Himself?

Or God? After all, it was God who painted the story of his life. He is at fault partly—if not entirely—for the agony that Jesus has gone through.

Jesus has not figured that out yet; he badly needs a moment of clarity, enlightenment, or a miracle perhaps.

His phone vibrates. It might be a new message from TheTrueGod666. His excitement melts away quickly when the screen displays the name 'Mom'. *Leave me alone!* Jesus sighs and declines the call that interrupted what could have been a divine inspiration. He puts the phone back into his pocket and keeps walking toward the willow tree at the edge of the cliff.

Turning his head up to the sky, where the inspiration awaits him, Jesus tries to find the sun hiding behind the clouds. He ducks when a fist comes at his face. *What're you doing, Omar,* Jesus says before realizing it was just another vision. He has been having lots of such visions lately, all foreseeing a violent future awaiting him. Perhaps they are just hallucinations. They better be. The future cannot possibly be that dark.

He is near the cliff when his left foot hits something. Sadness covers his face when he looks down. A dark-gray pigeon with green-purple iridescence is lying on the ground.

Dropping the canvas and the palette on the ground, he rushes and kneels before her. With love and care, he holds the seemingly dead pigeon in his arm. With his finger, he gently caresses the feathers on top of her head.

She does not move.

Tears well up in his eyes. *What would Jesus do?* Jesus wonders and feels his skin tingled with saintly energy that comes directly from the sky, from somewhere behind the clouds. Traveling through the network of neurons, the energy soon reaches every tired cell of his body, with its heavenly touch giving them a new life. He feels a divine presence throughout his body as if he is a host to a holy spirit resurrected within him.

Jesus closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. For the first time in his life, he feels right. He has embodied his destiny. He opens his eyes when he realizes that he is impulsively blowing upon the lifeless pigeon.

A lively yellow light shines on her feathers.

Jesus looks up and notices that the sun rules the sky again as it was ruling his heart. Inspired, he kisses the pigeon and throws her over the cliff, his wishful gaze follows her beginning her resurrected life.

The pigeon plummets to the bottom of the cliff like a dead stone; so does Jesus' self-esteem and the entire bright future that he has built in his mind.

It hurts. It hurts like never before.

With his face wrinkled with pain, he closes his eyes and drops his head.

FLAP! FLAP! FLAP!

Confused by the sound, Jesus opens his eyes.

The pigeon appears from the edge of the cliff and flutters up to the sky.

Hurrah! It worked. It really worked. The miracles do exist. His face splits into a wide grin. It feels like the joy of the world to see the pigeon flying again.

Another pigeon with green-purple iridescence appears from the edge of the cliff, and joining the other one, flies away. They look alike to Jesus, as normally pigeons do to humans. Which one did Jesus bring back to life? Or is she one of the two flying away? She should be. Yeah, she must be. No reason to ruin the majestic moment by overthinking. He congratulates his miraculous hand with a gentle kiss. Or was it the blow that was miraculous? *Does not matter,* he thinks.

Jesus looks around. There is no one to share this joyous moment with, nor anyone to have witnessed the miraculous act. *Who cares?* he thinks. *I witnessed that, and I know it's true. That's all that counts.*

Inspired, he is ready to start over. He can vividly see the happy ending in his next attempt at the painting. An ending free of violence. He has got to get rid of the old one as soon as possible. He looks around to find a place to dump it. There is no trash bin around. Behind the willow tree, there is a bush, but people might find it by accident. His gaze turns and falls on the cliff from which the resurrected pigeon flew away. An idea! No one would look down there. Taking a deep, relaxed breath, he throws the painting over the cliff. It feels good.

All energized, he sits on the grass, leaning back on the tree. He takes a blank stretched canvas and paints himself on the cross.

A reborn Jesus, a new painting.

The Savior

A few drops of ketchup, as red as blood, drips from his veggie burger and falls on the left side of his chest, right on his heart. It is going to leave a permanent stain on his orange official vest. But that in no way concerns Jesus as much as the vision that has just come to him: his heart bleeds like a runaway river charged by seasonal rain. The foreboding nature of the vision weighs heavily on Jesus' mind. If these visions truly foretell of his future, he would rather freeze time and stay in the present. Being broken-hearted does not seem too bad after all; better than the heart getting torn apart, Jesus' predetermined future that lurks around every corner. *How near is that bloody destiny?* Jesus wonders.

From a distance, the voice of a little girl cries, "Help!"

Jesus hears it while sitting on the grass, in the middle of the large open space commencing the adventure park. He stops chewing on his veggie burger.

As usual, there is little visitor traffic around the gate during lunchtime. Quite a few people are still in the area, of whom, God knows how many have the compassion to take time off their busy life in the adventure park and respond to the call for aid.

Trapped among Jesus' aspirations to save the day and to stretch out his hand for the ones in need, the voice repeats in His his head, its echoes sounding kind of like 'Help, Jesus.' or 'Help me, Lord.' *Who is this little one seeking me?* Jesus wonders and surveys the vast space of the adventure park. Near the exit gate, He he spots a Caucasian man holding the arm of a little Black girl.

"No-o-o-o-o," screams the seven-ish-year-old girl with short curly hair while being dragged out of the park.

Without missing a moment, Jesus spits out the chewed food and dashes toward them. "Hey, what's going on there?" He he yells while sprinting.

The girl turns back to the voice of her savior.

The Caucasian man does not. He looks bigger and bigger as Jesus nears, gradually casting doubts on Jesus' initial will to help. What was at first an inevitable path forward is now degrading to an option with pros and cons.

Jesus arrives, panting. With his stretched out hand barely reaching up to the tall man's shoulder, Jesus gently taps him. "Hey," he says and draws in another breath.

The man stops, his massive body like that of a destructing bulldozer. Muscles pop out of every corner of his body, suggesting that he has spent half of his fruitful, waking life in gyms—the other half in kitchens and bathrooms.

Jesus gulps in fear, his heart beating faster. He is no match for a muscular guy of that size. What was Jesus thinking? He was not. Ration has no place in Jesus' heart when it comes to saving the innocent.

With his thick neck slightly turning, over his shoulder the man gives Jesus a dirty look.

The half-eaten burger slides off Jesus' shaking hand. Frozen on the spot, he cannot say a word or make a move. He clenches his teeth to silence the sound of them chattering.

The man growls like a bull that he is.

Reflexively taking a step back, Jesus trips and falls on his butt.

Looking bigger than ever, the man sneers, his menacing glare replaced with a condescending one, which is somehow more unbearable to Jesus. Leaving Jesus crushed

and humiliated, he turns his head back and stomps toward the exit gate, pulling the little girl behind him.

Jesus watches her being taken away, but there is not much that he can do about it. What can average-size, artistic-natured Jesus possibly do to stop a mountain-size of stacked, mindless bricks. At the end of the day, Jesus is just a man. Or is he He?

An idea! Jesus remembers the miraculous moment He experienced a few days back.

The little girl starts whining as if she knows that among the people who hear there is now one who listens.

"Hang on, little one," Jesus mutters. "Jesus is here with you." Time has come for Him to use His powers for good. He stands up, closes His eyes, takes a deep breath, and wishfully blows in the direction of the girl, His palms out toward her. A sense of satisfaction and pride fills His heart and takes His mind up to the skies, where it belongs. It is like all events in His life, all the tragedies, all the recoveries and inspirations, they all have been preparing Him for this rewarding moment: to save an innocent child, which, by all definitions of the word, is the ultimate good deed. One cannot top that. *That was literally what Jesus would have done*, Jesus thinks and smiles.

The little girl keeps crying, louder this time.

His mind plummeting back onto Earth, Jesus opens his eyes, a bit confused and a lot disappointed.

The man is dragging the girl behind him, as he was before.

Perhaps it works only within a certain range, He he thinks of his miraculous blow. The thought, however, does not help with her begging cry. Jesus cannot bear an innocent kid's tears. He has to do something, anything, no matter the consequences. He takes a leap in the dark, gathers all his courage, and yells at the top of his voice, "Leave the kid alone."

The beefy man stops, his shoulders moving up and down telling of his fierce breathing. He lets go of the little girl's arm, returns to Jesus, and stomps toward him.

Jesus' heart plunges to His stomach. Trying to ignore the raging bull that is charging at him, he asks the girl, his voice shaky, "Do...do...do you know this man?"

She does not say anything and just wipes her tears with her now-freed sleeve.

The huge man's shadow falls across Jesus when he arrives. "None of your damn business," he barks, his deep voice as frightening as the twisted expression on his face.

"I... I... I'm making it my *damn* business," Jesus responds with a trembling voice after he swallows hard against the lump in his throat. The line that he borrowed from the TV show 'The Act of Valor' does not work as well as it did on TV.

Sneering through his clenched teeth, the guy puts his big hand on Jesus' face and violently thrust him backward.

Before he gets a chance to react, Jesus falls back on the ground like a lifeless staff. Apparently, God does not have his back as he thought He would. Is He not supposed to be with the good guys? Where is God where we need Him? Where is He now? What kind of Father abandons His son? Never writing a letter, not even a postcard! Where was He when Sally broke Jesus' heart to thousands of pieces? Where was He when Jesus suffered? The many nights that he shed his shattered heart out, one tear at a time.

The guy swings his right foot toward Jesus' stomach. Kicking the weak when he is down! It is as if he is providing hard evidence of his evil nature, sneering at God for doing nothing, just being a silent observer of the injustice on Earth, the kingdom of the devil.

Clenching his stomach, Jesus readies it for the pain of the upcoming kick. That is the gist of his life: getting kicked in the stomach, swallowing the pain, and then crawling back into his solitude, searching for a meaning for this meaningless cycle. He would pray for an intervention, a miracle, but if history has taught him anything is that God is more of a great listener than a moderate meddler. His hands are tight these days, if He ever had any.

A fisted hand punches the guy in the back of his head! Like 300 pounds of humane meat, he collapses to the ground, next to Jesus.

Pleasantly confused, Jesus looks up and finds Omar, his East Indian colleague, rubbing his knuckles. God indeed works in mysterious ways. This time apparently through Omar's fist!

One punch is all it took for Omar to knock the bulky man out. He is a kind of comic-book hero that Jesus neither is nor wants to be. Omar, as always, does not look handsome in his long beard and shaved mustache. His long greasy hair is his best feature, which makes him look somewhat likable. "Omar will later shave off his hair", foretells another vision that crosses Jesus' eyes. Jesus wishes that Omar would not. But knowing Omar and how stubborn and reckless he is, he probably will.

"Dude," Jesus objects to Omar, gesturing to the unconscious man lying down beside him, "I wasn't finished talking."

"Talking?!" Omar sneers. "Blah-blah doesn't get things done. Punching does. You should learn how to throw one. I'll teach ya."

"You could get fired, you know."

"Not if no one saw," Omar says while checking the surroundings. "Except this little one." He turns to the Black girl and kneels next to her like a soldier kneeling before a princess. "Where's your dad, Missy?" he asks, giving her a boop on the nose.

The little Black girl is not crying anymore. She takes a step closer to Omar as if she wants to take refuge in the arms of the brownish superhero. Half-way there, she takes a step back again, not clear why. She slowly raises her hand over Omar's shoulder, pointing to the knocked-out, Caucasian guy behind him.

That tiny piece of information paints the events quite differently. The jerk that Jesus stood up against and Omar stunned is not a kidnapper or anything like that. Biting his lips, Jesus turns to Omar, who is doing the same. They stare at each other, each waiting for the other to break the awkward silence. Although still a jerk, the guy is her father, and as a father he has the right to... Or does he?

"Well," Omar says, slapping his knees and standing up, "my job's done here. Are you finally joining us this Friday or what?"

"Dude, seriously? You're leaving?"

"I'll let you clean up the mess with...ah...with your blah-blah. Friday. Yes or No?"

"I'm not sure yet."

"You gotta start sometime," Omar says while stepping away. "Imam Zahid is the man of God. Trust me. It'll be good for you."

If only Omar could see the visions that Jesus does. There will be blood; Jesus' blood. And there will be a brown hand stained with it. Omar will stare at his hand painted red, like Lady Macbeth does. Weirdly enough Jesus worries for Omar's soul in that moment more than he does for his own bleeding body. If only Omar knew the dark future that is awaiting him.

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