

ATWH

Approximately 3,200 words

"ALL THE WAY HOME"

I was almost fourteen when I realized beyond any question that I was not God. The knowledge could not have come at a worse possible time. I was scheduled for a no holds barred fist fight the first moment Moon Mulroy set eyes on me. Now not being God is not in and of itself so bad once you accept the fact, however, not being God and having the threat of impending death hanging over you in the person of the meanest son of a dog in the free world does pose definite problems.

Actually, I had even begun to doubt my godliness a few weeks earlier when, for the first time in my life I could not con my mother out of five bucks for movie money. And, as if this was not bad enough, I was just out of house arrest for one week for screwing up on my math test and for being out one hour

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past curfew. Try as I might, and I tried mightily, I could not convince my father that I had to stay and finish out the card game Saturday night at Durrie's house because I was hot as a three dollar pistol. As for the test score, well that was a different game altogether. I figured I could lie my ass off and get away with it or just keep on forgetting to bring the note from my teacher home for my parents signature. I had not counted on that miserable son of a bitch, Brother Kadelmeyer, being of such low character as to doubt the word of a clean cut all American chubby cheeked guy like me. I was wrong. He had taken the time to call my folks and I paid the price, nearly with my life. All told though, I couldn't really pitch too much of a bitch, fearing as I did the chance that my folks and Kadelmeyer and even perhaps Brother Schmitty might get into a much heavier dialog. If this happened I was doomed.

It would only be a matter of minutes before I would be done in once they discovered I had cleverly changed my report card grades for both their classes, not to mention three of the remaining four classes I had that semester. I felt that even my most eloquent position statement that none of them really appreciated my true worth to the class but had reduced the whole course to a crass, meaningless numbers game, would not save me from a beating of homeric proportions. Further, I had to keep a tight lip about the ridiculous curfew situation, since drawing attention to it could wind up with my mother calling Durrie's mother and finding out that neither of us were at his house. Then, I knew in my heart of hearts it would be all over. There was no way I could admit that Durrie and I were at the house of a certain Mrs. Bixby, for whom

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two high school juniors of sixteen plus years were baby sitting and to whom Durrie and I had lied convincingly enough to convince them we were both seventeen years old and seniors at Boys Catholic High.

What, you might ask, has any of this to do with being or not being God. To which I would reply logically that if I was God I would certainly not let the situation get so out of hand, or my ass in such a god-awful sling.

The final insult was that the girl on whom I had spent the better part of Saturday night attempting to relieve of her very padded bra only to discover she was flatter than I was, had told her bother I was her new boyfriend. That was what clinched absolutely that I was not 'He who is'. Her brother turned out to be the self same Moon Mulroy, a two hundred pound linebacker and co-captain of the football, wrestling, and ass kicking teams at Catholic High. He naturally came looking to size up his kid sister's new flame and lay down the laws of accepted behavior.

It tickled him not at all to discover to the ridiculing snickers of several of his fellow ass kicking team members that his sister had been jived by a lowly tenth grader and even worse, a second team player on the J.V. football team. His sister's shame was his by proxy and he was going to address it forthwith by caving my face in the moment he caught up with me. There you have it. Small wonder that I peeked out my front door so cautiously that I must have resembled a mouse peeking from a hole rather than a youth who had just resolved that he was merely mortal.

Durrie's car was nowhere in sight. I had already figured the rat-fink son of a bitch to leave me out to dry despite his promise to drive me to school so I could at least scurry to the comparative safety of the classroom before Mulroy caught me and obliterated my existence. What I would do for the rest of the day and at football practice, and then for the rest of my life had not been thought out yet. I knew my parents would not let me transfer to another school, preferably at the other end of the world, nor was there much chance that a stray airplane would fall on Mulroy's head and solve my problems.

About then, Durrie's car swung into view as it rounded the corner and pulled to a stop in front of my house. I dashed to the car which pulled quickly away from my house and mentally made a note to question Durrie at some later time as to the logic behind the ridiculous stuck-on mustache and oversized glasses he was wearing. All he needed were ringlets and he would have made a great hasidic merchant. Actually, I knew it was his subtle way of saying it was not safe to be seen in my company, but I would not give him the chance to whine by commenting on it.

Once we hit school, I jumped out of his car at the back of the building, skirted the main hall, got to my locker, grabbed my books and only felt my heart beat slow a bit once I was safely in my seat in Brother Mac's homeroom.

I fidgeted my way clean through homeroom and English which also took place in Brother Mac's room. At the end of class I hung back, letting the other guys charge from the classroom in the typical stampede fashion. I figured I

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could walk to my next class with Brother Mac who I knew always hit the head at the end of the hall near my next class. Brother Mac was a "brick", that's a "B", was not a hell of a lot older than the seniors, and in fact looked more like a teenager in a borrowed cassock than a Jesuit brother. He was a confidant to most of the guys because he smoked and cursed, and I really do believe he still thought about girls cause even though he turned red as hell when us guys talked about tall in the boys' room, he never made a bee line for the door.

Well, I figured this was pretty cunning on my part till I got to the door of my next class and Brother Mac smiled at me, a bit cynically I thought, and said that it was a pretty good move on my part, but he wondered what I was going to do for the rest of the day. I yelped in surprise and he assured me that everyone in the school was taking bets and giving odds that Mulroy would hammer me by day's end. So much for clandestine moves. The whole world of Catholic High knew of my problem and I was sure that any chance of mercy flew out the window with that general knowledge. Now Mulroy would have to make an absolute example of me. As Brother Mac had added with a cheery smile, when we parted company, "Hamll, you're dead meat". By lunch, my nerves were as raw as a sandpapered ass. I had ducked and dodged through three classroom changes expectant that at any moment I would skulk past a doorway and feel the coarse fingers of Mulroy's hands close around my throat to be quickly followed by my exit from this veil of tears.

I totally avoided the lunchroom knowing that if cornered in that area of controlled chaos, serious and permanent damage could occur before any of the disinterested Brothers acting as monitors could interfere. Instead I gulped down my sandwich which I never tasted and esconced myself in the school library directly in front of the head librarian, vigorously poring over a copy of "Quo Vadis" which made less sense to me than usual. The librarian only did one double take seeing me there, then retreated behind her bi-focals, paying me no more mind till lunch hour was about over and I prepared to make my dash for the next class.

As I peered out the door the librarian, Mrs. Sneed, touched me lightly on the shoulder causing me to jump about two feet above the existing world's record. "I'm really pleased to see you've finally decided to give education a chance Mr. Hamill." Her voice was as crisp and school marmish as always. I forced a wan smile onto my face and instead of telling the old bitch to stuff it, I replied. "Yes, indeed Mrs. Sneed, it's true I've finally seen the need". She smiled warmly and said "too bad it's too late, Mulroy's going to crush your cookies good and proper". She winked adding, "I've got five bucks on it".

I tore from the library in a frenzy. The old bat's cackling, get even laugh sounding in my ears. It was clear to me now in all its horrid magnitude there was no haven for me in this school. Too many teachers had been riled by me during my year and a half at Catholic High. I realized now that these people tended to look upon my innocent boyish pranks as the devil at work and were actually looking forward to seeing my brains dashed out in high ceremony on the school steps.

The bastards all wanted me dead.

Only by changing my routes to my last two classes did I manage to avoid my nemesis, not however without cost. My circuitous routes made me late for both classes which resulted in a detention being handed me by both teachers amid the only marginally suppressed laughter of my cloddish classmates. Durrie in true best friend fashion tried to cheer me up, whispering in a stage voice that current tallies showed me no worse than down three to one in the betting by my classmates and teachers, to make it through the day. No one was even considering tomorrow or the rest of my life. I thanked Durrie with a word I'd rather not repeat as the teacher heard it, along with everyone else in class, and he tacked on another detention with a happily malicious smirk.

At last I reached the real moment of truth. It was time for me to go to the locker room and change into my gear for football practice. I would have to guess that quite a few others felt that way too. Someone could have made good money selling refreshments to the sizeable crowd waiting by the team locker room. Try as I might I could not convince Durrie to go pick up my gear for me. He in fact showed the true meaning of best friends by scooting homeward with the reassuring words "I'll stop for you tomorrow. If you can't make it, have somebody call me so I don't go out of my way."

I favored him with some serious language depicting certain relationships in his family, which a better man than that rank weasel would have been forced to counter with a knuckle sandwich.

Unfortunately, Brother Vallucci, the school disciplinarian, was lurking nearby simply waiting his chance. A good fight or even a bad one as this would surely be, meant at least suspensions. My words cost me another two detentions and the wonderful news from Vallucci that he had a dinner bet on Mulroy crunching me, plus a ten dollar bet giving odds and he would be personally very angry if I did not have the courage and good form to take my thrashing like a real trooper and for once be a credit to dear old Catholic High. Several other students joined in and only to escape their derisive tongues I slipped into the locker room.

It was quiet as a tomb. Terrifyingly quiet. I continuously peeked and probed my way through the dormant stillness of what should have been a room full of cacophonous noise. Not a creature was stirring. I breathed deep and threw my gear on saying Hail Mary's as quickly as I could silently mouth them. Then I dashed out the back door to the safety of the practice field and coaching staff, my nerves about as tight as they could be tuned. I almost expected to hear a "sproinging" sound when they finally snapped.

The whole team was already on the field. They had apparently gotten suited up and out early, leaving the lockers so they thought to Mulroy and his prey. I received numerous openly curious glances from my fellow J.V.er's. Some actually glanced at me with eyes filled with the kind of sympathy usually reserved for dead relatives. You know, sorry but glad its not yourself in the box. At least none of the coaching staff seemed to have been aware of my approaching doom and the practice went its normal course.



I buried my nose in our little portion of the field reserved for the J.V's, never even looking over to the main field where the Varsity team ruled supreme. However, I had forgotten it was "cannon fodder" day. The day when the Varsity worked on new plays or ironed out kinks in old ones through the method of a "Dummy Scrimmage". They, the Varsity, doing the scrimmaging, we, the hopeless JV's, providing the dummies in the persona of ourselves. At best of times a non-fun item if you happened to be a lowly J.V. and much worse a second team J.V.. You were little more than an object to be mowed down like the Aussies at Gallipoli, who I am quite certain had a better chance at survival than we did.

Anyway, I shuddered at the evil beauty of it all. No wonder that swine Mulroy had not bothered to come looking for me all day. He did not have to. He had foreseen that I eventually would have to come to him . He would have the opportunity to bludgeon me to death without a dirty look much less a reprimand from the school disciplinarian. I felt my bones shudder with an ague of fear as much from his surprising cunning, which I had previously believed in my godly days as being denied behemoths because they had everything else, as from the anticipated physical crunch. Everything in me sagged as I went with my fellow sheep to take up our positions for the slaughter.

As I stood studying the Varsity team lining up, I realized with stunning clarity that I had been spared. Was this possible? Yes. Oh God yes. Mulroy was not there. Incredible! Outragious! Beautiful! Those were my feelings as I double checked the whole body of the Varsity. He was not in the line up nor was he on the field. I loved it. I felt absolutely giddy. Nothing that could

happen in this scrimmage could dampen my spirits. I was going to make it through the day. As if to make my thoughts of salvation complete, I heard Durrie shouting to me from the sidelines. I turned to stare at his wildly gesticulating form 15 yards away. "Hamill, you are one lucky son of a bitch", he shouted with uncontrolled enthusiasm. I raised my arms in a gesture of non-comprehension. "Didn't you hear? Didn't you hear about Mulroy?" I shook my head negatively but felt a growing sense of victory flowing into me in response to Durrie's excited voice. "The big sucker slipped and broke his goddamn leg and he's in the hospital in a cast up to his ass". I whooped for joy feeling the complete belief in my godliness return in unfettered awesome power. How could I ever have doubted.

I never even knew my leg was broken till I came to in the ambulance as they were taking me out and into emergency admissions. The coach, his face ash white and nervous, forced a smile onto his bloodless lips when he saw I had come to. "Don't worry kid", he said anxiously. "Everything's goin' to be okay. We called your folks and they're on their way. It's gonna be just fine". I felt giddy and sick at the same time but kind of at ease. "What happened?" I mumbled, just starting to feel the pain in my leg.

"That's what I'd like to know", said the coach. "I heard you yell and when I looked, you were jumping in the air looking the other way just as Basco hit you with a block. You never saw it coming and I heard your leg break from 30 yards away". I started to laugh. I had won. I had made it. Screw the broken leg. At least I was safe here in the hospital with a broken leg and then a recupe job at

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home. I could milk this one forever. No way Mulroy could get at me here. It came back to me and I laughed even harder. I'm sure coach thought I was delirious. Mulroy had a broken leg too. This was downright delicious. I then registered the coach was talking as they wheeled me out of emergency. I must have dozed or something for now there was a heavy dead weight cast pinning me to the rolling bed. "...Take care of you, you won't want for company." I caught the coach's words through a haze, "can't believe this, two legs... same damn day." I mumbled back. "S'only one leg coach." Then froze in mid-mumble as the impact of his words sunk in as they wheeled me into a two bed room in which the other bed held..... "OH SWEET JESUS" - Well, I didn't really want to be God anyway.

"The End"