

Paul Dickey

## *God*

A man was crawling around the floor on all fours looking for a dropped screw out of a motor and he found God. He was a tiny God of course, but the man knew He would have to do. Besides, he was sure everyone had theirs already. At first, no one noticed what the man had found. The motor started working again and everyone assumed the screw had been found. But soon the man used his God in mysterious ways – lifting oil stains out of the carpet, creating fire from sticks, knocking bananas out of trees before the others got to them. He had to do it. The neighbors particularly were bad and competitive that way. The others consequently did not survive, it was written. Or at least didn't get ahead, as it was said around the water fountain. Some say it was their evil ways, their Gods were not the true God, or maybe, it was natural selection -- but that sounded too much like that old fashioned theory of evolution to many (or at least those who were old enough to have studied it when it had been taught in school) and so no one actually thought that anymore. But Darwin never said God did not exist.

## *Hacking Rilke's Phone*

*Rilke quotations are from his novel "The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge" translated by M. D. Herter Norton*

Rilke won't play ball with us, they said.  
But we got the scoop.  
He had no clue what our thugs  
are now capable of. He thought it  
a scandal that his patron Werner Reinhart  
had put him up in a drafty castle,  
but now we can tell you why he did.  
It is just modern journalism.  
Listen. We got *this* on tape from the man  
professing silence to the world, so-called "solitude:"  
*One must see many cities, men, and things.*  
*One must be able to think back to days of childhood*  
*that are still unexplained, to parents whom one had to hurt*  
*when they brought joy and did not grasp it.*

Although admittedly we ached to get him  
on prime-time cable news for the ratings,  
we could not imagine or abide  
his hypocrisy and treason.  
He got away in the end with nothing from us,  
even though he continued to protest –  
*and it is not yet enough.*  
*One must have memories of many nights of love,*  
*none like the others.*  
*One must have been beside the dying,*  
*sat beside the dead in the room*  
*with the open window and the fitful noises—*  
*not till then can it happen*  
*that in a most rare hour the first word goes forth.*

Us, ashamed? Naw, we are proud of ourselves.  
Elbowed out of the twenty-four hour news cycle,  
we knew the world would lose interest  
in this minor Bohemian poet.  
We had bugged his room and his roses  
with thorns for the sake of a single story.

## *Cracker Barrel*

In the valley of the shadow of death, I found no good or evil. My wife was with me. We stopped at Cracker Barrel for breakfast, lunch, and dinner twenty-four hours a day. The parking lot was without form, and void. "We are at last home from our travels, Penelope," I said while getting out of the car. Our son's sister-in-law's husband worked at a Cracker Barrel in Alabama. We walked through the garden of retro Coca Cola trays and nostalgic divinity in the cool of the day. I shall not want. Like I said, my wife was with me. But Jamal is not from the tropical paradise of Jamaica, as is our daughter-in-law's family. In the dining room, the warmth of the massive fireplace burned in the presence of my friends and enemies. The management saw that it was good. The staff they comfort me. My boyhood god Bob Dylan ate biscuits and gravy alone in the corner in his running shoes and a hoodie. He seemed to want it no other way. Fifty years ago, Jamal and he might have been Black, even Afro-American. He looks among the salt and pepper shakers for new songs of early Greek and Roman kings and high flood waters. My cup runneth over, sings Ed Ames, as if it is the greatest love song of all time. And Bob saw that it was good and he was jealous. Already on tour, Bob got up from his table and he too walked the valley of the shadow of death, but with his almost invisible security. And Bob said, let there be a firm ad man in the midst, and let him divide the *waiters* from the *waiters*. And it was so. And Bob said, Let there be a bus, and there was a bus.

## *How Would We Live Then?*

I just have one little question, I said to Betty who was packing. Do you mind? *Don't be silly*, she exclaimed, *anything*. Anything, I asked? Well, what if we do, and the baby turns out to have an absolutely non-stop, leaky basement? No matter what landscaping we try, nothing works. Every time it rains, I am down there all night moving furniture just to keep us dry. She says that is why she loves me. *Anything else*, she laughs? Well, what if our dream house, the one with five bedrooms and four baths that we build in ten years, gets lousy gas mileage and the price at the pump goes to \$10 per gallon? She says *well, I suppose we would sell it. There are always options, of course. But that won't happen*. And I come back, but what about that Lexus after I get my promotion? It could be totally, well, you know, challenged. I know that sounds harsh, but things like that happen to people and what would we do? The steering wheel won't ever say a blasted word. I lose my temper and all and stay up in the garage all night insanely pounding on it. Some totally genetic thing or other. She looks at me and screws up her face. *Jack? What are you saying? You'd be a father. You wouldn't do a thing like that*. I reply, well just look at Don's Fiat. Yeah, it was cute for awhile making all those silly gurgling noises, but then even Josie began to sound sad whenever she rode in it. Betty replied this is just not going to happen to us. I argued well, it could. *And we would still love each other*, she cried, and bounded from the room and went back to her packing. I got more and more depressed. In a while, she sneaked back into the room and hugged me. *So what if none of those horrible, horrible things actually happen? Huh, Jack? What will we do then?* Her voice was sounding a bit desperate. Well, I said, I guess everything would be perfect. Like our vacation tomorrow to Arizona, changing the subject. *Right*, she concluded, and scooted quickly out of the room and back to her packing. And I got to thinking. My ex, Julie, began to seem prettier to me than Betty, and I remembered that I had kissed Julie once and the whole side of her mouth looked like the awesome and beautiful East side of the Grand Canyon.