

*For Pete Dully. Hopefully this will make your canon some day.*

## The Gospel of Bubba

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—Malcolm

TEN YEARS AGO, I WAS WORKIN AT CIRCLE K convenience store cleanin and stockin stuff. The owner, Mr. Barbrady was a friend of my mama's, and he's real nice so he gived me a job. He said, "Bubba, you make your mama and me proud when you workin. You work hard no matter what, ya hear?" 'cept he don't talk bad like me. Well, I sure did like that job a whole lot. I liked cleanin and stockin.

Sometimes he even lemme make the sammiches that we sold in the cooler. I always liked slicin the meat on the slicer because when I was doin it I could look at the knives on the wall. I sure do like knives. The Circle K had all kinds of knives. Big ones. Small ones. Medium ones. The bigger ones was real wide and maybe half a foot or so, and the small ones was as big as a pinky finger—the blades that is. I liked em cause they was real shiny. Sometimes I forgot about the slicin and I'd just be grindin the end of the ham or whatever for half a hour before someone come yell at me.

Well this here's the story that I's supposed to write down for you. One day I was workin with Wendy. Boy I sure did like Wendy a whole lot. She was so pretty. She had the most gorgeous hair I'd ever seen, then or now. And she was always real nice to me and I was always nice to her. Not everyone was real nice to me like Wendy or Mama or Mr. Barbrady so I's always liked to say when people is nice to me. Wendy was workin up at the casher, and I was slicin the ham for ham sammiches when I started lookin at the knives like I always do but this time was different. This time they started *really* shinin

real bright, and I had to put my hands up, and all the sudden the brightness died down and there was this shiny man floatin about in front of the knives. I squinted at him for a sec and then he said, "Bubba this is God."

I bout crapped myself cause I couldn't believe that God would be speakin to someone like me. They's more important people to speak to like the prezident or famous people or some-thin. Those people is smarter than me. So God starts goin on again, and he said, "Bubba, listen to me. People has lost faith in me and you gonna help me fix that up right quick."

That confused me. "How am I supposed to fix that up? Ain't nobody ever care what I say."

"That don't matter, Bubba. You gonna help me, and then you gonna write about it later. And people will believe you."

I don't know why God wanted me to write. I don't write all that well. Don't talk so well neither. But here he is telling me I gots to do just that. "What am I supposed to write about? I don't got nothin to say."

And then God smiled at me and said, "There's some bad man comin in here right now. You get a couple of these here knives, and you get him.

You stop him from hurtin your friend Wendy. And he'll hurt her. Hurt her bad."

I got scared. I ain't been in a fight or nothin really cause Mama always told me that fightin was bad and I should be a passafist. And I was. So I says to God, "I'm scared. Why do I gotta hurt this guy? What's he gonna do?"

And then God set me straight sayin, "Bubba, I'm not gonna lie. He's comin at you with a gun. You gotta swing them knives to stop the bullets, and then cut him until he can't hurt nobody no more. I'll be on your side but I can't do it for you."

I started cryin just a little and I told God that I'd do it even though I was scared as heck. So I grabbed those knives up and walked out the stock room door into the front towards the cashier.

Sure enough, God was right. There was this man wearin a ski-mask, wavin a gun in Wendy's face. She was so scared and sobbin and that made me start to cry a little more cause she was makin me more scared. Wendy looked at me and she got more scared too and then I started shakin and the guy turned to me and said, "Put down those knives stupid or I'll blow your blankin head off" but he didn't say blankin. God don't

like swearin so I don't do it.

I was breathin so hard and cryin a little more and I knew if I didn't do what God said me and Wendy were gonna get hurt real bad so I yelled and charged at him swingin my knives as good as I could.

I heard the gun fire and it was so loud but when I was chargin I wasn't scared anymore because I knew God was with me, and I heard the bullets hit the knives and wizz by and soon he was out of em and I kept swingin them knives until he was all cut up and wasn't movin on the floor and Wendy stopped me. She was yellin at me, screamin, "Bubba! Bubba! Are you crazy?! Why'd you do that you coulda been killed!" and she fell to the floor and I fell with her and we was cryin and I said I was sorry but I had to stop the bad man and we sat there and cried for what seemed like forever, and then a customer came in and saw the man and ran out and called the cops.

They put me in the cruiser cause I was covered in blood and it did look kinda bad but Wendy told them what happened but they didn't believe her at first. So they hauled me off to the station and put me in a room with a mirror. Soon enough, this guy in a suit come in and started talkin to me but I don't remember his name. I

think he was a cop cause he had a badge but he wore a suit so I'm not sure. He said, "Your friend Wendy said that you charged that man with knives because he had a gun."

I said, "Yea, I did that."

He said, "Well, why'd ya do that?"

I looked at his face and said, "God said I had to save Wendy and me from that bad man."

He kinda looked at me real funny like and then laughed once, shakin his head and mumblin something about God. Then he said, "You is lucky to be alive."

I didn't think lucky had nothin to do with it. God was there protectin me. He said he was. I didn't tell him that cause he laughed at me a little. I don't like bein laughed at.

Then the man said, "You know why they hauled you in, boy?" and I shook my head no.

"They hauled you in because they thought your friend Wendy was full of blank" but again he didn't say blank. "They said there was no way in heck that you stopped all them bullets with knives. No way in heck. But I saw them knives, boy. And I found all the bullets. Sure enough, you is one lucky son of a blank." And he laughed pretty hard. "You want somethin to drink, boy? Water or

coke or coffee?"

I was real thirsty for milk but I knowed that he didn't have none on hand cause nobody ever does so I said no thank you and he said he was gonna try and get ahold of my mama.

It wasn't too long before Mama came burstin in, cryin like it was gonna be banned tomorrow, huggin me and kissin my forehead sayin stuff like it was a miracle and then scoldin me for bein so stupid and then sayin more stuff about a miracle happenin. I was cryin too and I thought it was all a miracle too. And I thought about God.

I slept a lot the next day. Musta been fourteen hour at least. I kept dreamin about the phone ringin and slammin down but turns out I wasn't dreamin at all. Reporters kept callin, askin to talk to me, Mama said. I didn't believe her one bit. Nobody ever really wanna talk to me, but they heard about God talkin to me and now they wanna talk to me about God talkin to me. But Mama kept hangin up the phone, tellin them not to call back, and I asked her why but she just said, "Cause people will think you's crazy Bubba, talkin about God like that!" and she start to wailin again. That didn't make no sense because I knowed Mama believed in God because she told me about Him.

Two days later, I's sup-

posed to work but when I got to the store Mr. Barbrady was there and so were the police. He didn't look none too happy so I waited for him to talk to me first. He said, "Bubba! Bubba, we need to talk in the back office." and I got scared. Only times I been back there were bad times. I'd get yelled at for this or that but I'd only been back there twice. This makes number three. Like three strikes is what I was thinkin.

So I followed him back there and he shut the door and said, "Bubba, thank God you're alright. I think you did a good thing stoppin that blankhole. Real good thing." Mr. Barbrady liked to swear a lot but I never said nothin because it wasn't right to talk back to your boss.

I breathed a sigh of relief. I thought I'd gone and done it this time. "I was just doin what God told me to. I didn't really wanna hurt nobody."

Mr. Barbrady stopped me and said, "Bubba you did alright. I think you probably had to do it for you and Wendy. That man was a real son of a blank who killed a lot of people before he came here. A real son of a blank."

"That's what God said!" 'cept God didn't say any bad words, just that the man was real bad.

Mr. Barbrady, he laughed

a little, and then he looked at me real serious like, and he said, "Son, do you know why the cops are here right now?" and I said no. He said, "They was clearin off a bunch of crazies blankers that wanna come see the miracle kid at the Circle K."

That scared me a little bit again. Why would people I don't know come lookin for me? I didn't like the way that sounded. Not at all.

"Well, Bubba, I talked to your Mama and she agrees with me. So listen, you can't come to work for a while. I don't want no crowd of crazy blankholes around the store, and nobody needs to be botherin you or your Mama." I got sad and started breathin harder, but he rushed to say, "Now Bubba it's only temporary now, okay? Only til this whole thing dies down some." and he hugged me and I was sobbin. I was bein fired and I didn't like it one bit.

"Bubba, you is like a son to me, and I don't want you or your Mama gettin hurt or bothered by some idiot yokels who think you some kind of savior. That stuff may have been a miracle, but Godblankit you is still Bubba! Not nothin else!"

"I's sorry Mr. Barbrady, I's sorry! I work harder when I come back and I won't mess at all with them knives again." I wiped my nose and eyes on my

shirt even though Mama always tells me not to.

"I'll keep in touch with your Mama, and you get some rest, ya here? Go on, she should be out there waitin for ya."

I closed the office door behind me and I think I heard him laughin but when I turned around I realized that he was cryin in there. I started cryin some more. It was not a good time for me.

So that was ten years ago. I still don't have my job back. Mama just take care of me. We had to move out in the country instead of in the city, so now I's not close to anything so I just walk around in the woods or the field or wherever there ain't cars drivin by. Mama works a whole lot more but she make me take care of the house and the gardenin and repairin stuff. I never saw Wendy again. She didn't come back to work or anything, and I never got the chance to ask nobody else about it. Sometimes we get a visitor wantin to talk to me but Mama has to chase em off cause she think they all crazy.

God was with me that day no doubt. And I thank him a lot for that. I just wish he were here right now. If he is, I can't see him anymore.