



What God Sees
by Scott D. Pomfret

from *Post Road 6*

Selected by David Ebershoff, author of *The 19th Wife*, *Pasadena*, *The Rose City*, and *The Danish Girl*.

It begins with a mega promise: "This is what God sees." Who could resist? And what God sees, according to Scott D. Pomfret, is this: a teenage boy IM'ing with a dirty old man; a cop snoozing in his squad car; a mother whose dreams have left her; another mother who calls her daughter (lovingly) a twat; and, finally, a pedophile on his way to meeting up with that teenage boy. What follows is a story that more than delivers on its promise to the reader. In showing us what God might see, Pomfret has given us a work of art. – DE.

This is what God sees:

- A fifteen-year-old boy basking in the blue light of his computer at an hour long past midnight in the tiny hamlet of Sabbaday, Maine. His mother's name is

Fuqua, and the kids at school have been calling him Fuckwad since he can't remember when.

- A poster of Courtney Love above Fuckwad's head. She is haggard, tortured, and fabulous.
- Fuckwad's best clothes laid out on his bed, like a chalk figure outlined on the road where he was killed. The room stinks of pajamas, stale spunk, and Lifesaver candies.
- An old man in skivvies a thousand miles away, who has been pretending to be an online boy. He fingers himself as views the jpeg file that Fuckwad has sent by email.
- A busy young man who reeks of patchouli. He brews crystal meth in the basement, which he rents for fifty bucks a week from Fuckwad's Mom.
- In an alley nearby, a police officer dozes in his patrol car. He has been on duty for the past twelve years straight and -- even though he's the only full-time police officer in Sabbaday Township -- they call him "Chief".
- In the house across the street, a teller newly hired at Sabbaday's only bank. The woman calls her mother long-distance and boasts, "I just got a job in a fuckin' bank! A fuckin' bank!"
- On a wooded highway three hours south of Sabbaday, Fuckwad's stalker. The map he has downloaded from the internet shows the town circled in red.

God sees these converging souls and says, *Bring it on*. God has a thing for train wrecks. He can see them coming a million miles away.

This is what the stalker sees:

- a cairn at the roadside with a hinge embedded where it once penned sheep;
- a mossy projection of fallen tree that could have been a helicopter wreck;
- a collection of fireflies;
- dozens of mile markers;
- wisps of valley fog like long white arms;
- cartoon hallucinatory boys populating the trees and roadside, delightful specimens with clear skins and downy napes and rosy cheeks and willing bums, boys of every flavor and description -- a glimpse, in short, of heaven.

If God sees everything, the stalker thinks, then He must be in a million boy's bedrooms every night!

An errant moose stumbles from the trees into his path. The stalker jerks the wheel. His tires momentarily lose purchase. The engine pitches and hums.

The stalker thinks: *What if I had hit him and drowned in an avalanche of moose guts? Or caught a hoof to the temple and dashed out my brains? Mom would have been mystified: what in God's name was he doing deep in the backwoods of Maine?*

The stalker feels mysterious and superior and full of destiny. He reaches beneath the seat. God sees the red tin child's toolbox the stalker keeps hidden there. It stores colored condoms and flavored lubricants and a series of graduated butt plugs and ass beads enough to say a rosary on.

A lick of jelly hangs loose from an open tube of K-Y where the cap had been. God smiles and decrees the sacred law of toothpaste is applicable to personal lubricant: *squeeze from bottom and flatten as you go up.*

At the end of the highway, up in Sabbaday, Fuckwad hears the bank teller boast to her mother. He hears Chief snore in the alley. He smells the noxious stench rising from the basement through the rags the patchouli boy has jammed in the crack beneath the door. On his keyboard, he bangs out: "*omg, i know every fucking little thing that goes on in this fucking town!! every fucking little thing!*"

Fuckwad presses "send," and the words appear like a prayer in a dialogue box on the monitor of the old man in his skivvies a thousand miles away.

The man frowns. He despises the term "omg" (oh my God). He is very Catholic and he does not appreciate the Lord's name being taken in vain.

Fuckwad types: *i can still back out, if i want to.*

Boys are too adorable to hold a grudge, so the old man puts aside his scruples concerning the Lord and returns a sympathetic reply. He types in lowercase, punctuated by myriad emoticons, which he thinks mask his age. He encourages Fuckwad to take all the necessary precautions.

Fuckwad messages back: *BEEN THERE, DONE THAT!!! TOOK CARE OF EVERYTHING!!!*

The old man writes: *'k, kewl. just makin sure yr safe. ;-).*

He adds: *maybe u shd tell me where u live again, if something happens, ill call the police.*

Fuckwad demurs: *nah its cool.*

He looks at the words he has sent and they seem mean. He quickly adds: *i dont want you comin up here and stealing my man!!!*

Then he writes: *j/k.*

The old man writes: *lol.*

But on a scrap of paper on his desk, Fuckwad quickly scribbles everything he has learned about the stalker from their online chats. In case something goes wrong, he does want them to be able to track that son-of-a-bitch down and kill him. Fuckwad's a fag, but he wants to make clear to everyone that he can still kick ass, if he has to.

unless u fall in luv, the old man writes. then u wont want him dead.

yeah that wd be mad cool. prob fall in love and go away somewhere. somewhere fab.

Fuckwad presses 'send.' And then he types more: *no one will ever guess that i was the only kid in this town maybe the whole state who's gay.*

For a moment, it seems just possible that this stranger from far away whom Fuckwad has never met might turn out to be just like him.

The old man doesn't have the courage to write, *u can always come here.*

In the morning, Fuckwad's mother finds Fuckwad slumped over the keyboard. He hastily minimizes the last dialogue box and covers the scrap of paper on his desk where he has written "versatile" and "uncut", even though he is not sure what they mean.

Mother and son stare at one another other.

Fuckwad snaps, “I can take care of myself! I don’t *need* you sticking your big fat honker into every-fucking-thing I do.”

Ms. Fuqua, whose honker is average at best, is young and still pretty. Only her hands have gotten old, and she rubs them constantly with lotion, as if she could wash off the blood.

Her thirty-four years in Sabbaday have been a long haul. Everything Ms. Fuqua has ever achieved, she got on her own. With her own two hands, her own tits and -- sometimes-- her own body. She has learned not to rely on God, or boyfriends, or her mother, or anyone else – including, for that matter, wise-ass sons.

Fuckwad watches his mother with a surly sense of uneasy superiority. Since his mother got a boyfriend, they no longer do any of the things they used to do together when he was a little boy. They don't hunt brake greens or wild berries. She no longer lets him make green bean casserole from Campbell’s mushroom soup, a can of green beans, and fried onions. They don't do *anything* together anymore. So, Fuckwad has taken to spying on his mother. Even though he knows she would hate him if she ever found out. And he has learned a lot from what he's seen.

It’s too early in the morning to pick a fight, Ms. Fuqua ultimately decides. She’s late for work, she’s not had her second cup of coffee, her mother is dying, and her boyfriend’s been worrying her all night with demands for sex.

Christ, she thinks wearily, *one of these days, I’d just like to get a little help here. Why does everything have to be such a goddamn chore?*

God's ears prick up at the sound of His name. He considers performing a miracle, but quickly deduces that Ms. Fuqua's use of the terms "Christ" and "God" was purely rhetorical.

Deal later, she thinks. Go to work. Let Fuckwad go back to sleep. What harm can it do?

It never occurs to Ms. Fuqua to issue a more formalized request (a so-called "prayer") for God to watch over her son in her stead and protect him from every evil, world without end, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, amen.

God is not, in Ms. Fuqua's experience, in the protection business.

Others' experience may be different. In the two full years since he has discovered the internet, for example, the stalker has been getting away with murder: on weeknights, he arranges meetings by instant message with underage boys. Weekends, he meets them and takes them to motels. All over New England.

Virgin to virgin, fuck to fuck. And never once has he been caught. Never prosecuted. God only has been his witness. If any of the boys' parents find out at all, they shush Junior in front of the neighbors and enroll him in boxing lessons and tell him what a horrible person he is.

How else can you explain the stalker's run of luck, unless God has had a hand in it?

At dawn, God sees Chief snort and wake. He is stiff and cold and his pants are unzipped. Across the street, in the dark of her bedroom, the bank teller puts on the dress

she has bought from Penny's for her new job. She is hungover and tired and tells her pretty daughter to hurry the fuck up and get her twat out of the bathroom already, so she can do her hair.

A thousand miles away, the old man who was pretending to be a boy chooses one of the many empty pews at seven o'clock Mass. The old man prays, the church is cold, the gilt glitters like new snow. The old man says, *God, please look out for this boy in Maine who writes to me.*

God laughs. God thinks: *You just want to be able to watch, old man. Like I watch. Trust me, I know you. I see what's in your heart of hearts.*

A candle flickers. The old man looks up. He sees no one, but feels this unaccustomed presence, a spiritual static. He frowns sourly, and slides to the end of the pew as if, grudgingly, to make room.

Chief cruises the town. He slows when he spots the stalker's Acura with the Massachusetts plates parked beneath the trees. Vagrancy and loitering and other charges from the book flip through Chief's head. He saunters to the front window and is about to tap it with his night stick. A banjo version of the *Ave Maria* play on the stalker's car radio.

It appears the old man's persistent prayers are going to be answered and Fuckwad will be saved from what he got himself into.

But back in his church a thousand miles away, a sound draws the old man's attention from his good intention. A real live altar boy, rare bird, has come out to the altar to douse the candles. The old man fingers himself. His mouth goes dry. He

wonders at the glory God has wrought beneath the boy's cassock, and is mortally ashamed of his desire and afraid he will burn in Hell.

As a consequence, in Sabbaday, Chief stops short. He considers himself to be a tolerant man, and thinks there must be crimes elsewhere more worthy of being stopped. The sleeping man in the car does not look to Chief like a drug dealer. He looks, rather, as if he could use a little sleep. Chief easily conjures a hard night and a difficult wife and a whole lot of ordinary loneliness, so he decides to give the stalker a break. All things being equal, Chief is a good man. He makes do with the meager gifts God has allotted to him.

Chief thinks: *This could be my neighbor. Love my neighbor as myself.* He does not much like himself, but he lets the man sleep. He thinks: *I don't have to feel obliged to do another nice thing for twenty-four hours.*

God's eyes must be as multifaceted as a housefly's, a constant stream of video over a powerful internet connection, simul-cast images in real-time from every corner of the globe. There's a lot to keep watch over. This, for example, is what he sees from his satellite office in downtown Sabbaday on a weekday afternoon:

- A lanky shirtless teen perched on the backrest of a park bench in Sabbaday Square. He has knotted a bandanna around his head and flexes the muscles he has developed from lifting weights in the barn.

- A passing car that slows to check out the shirtless teen's pipes, which bear a tattoo: JDFOS. Which means: "Jesus Died for Our Sins."
- A cluster of the boy's ragged friends, who are his Greek chorus and laugh track.
- Sabbaday's long-defunct Bijou on the opposite side of the street from the pretty boy and his chorus. It has plywood nailed over the door, and a faded poster advertising "Footloose" pasted to the glass.
- Beneath the marquee, Fuckwad waiting. He stands stiff as a pencil.

God is not sentimental. He lets the drama unfold.

An Acura whispers to the curb. Fuckwad steals a quick glance at the stalker, and then folds his lanky frame into the front seat.

The stalker drinks in the same details that God sees: Fuckwad's tight, brown Leprechaun curls. His hooded runaway eyes. Fuckwad's disappointment that the stalker was not as handsome as Fuckwad had hoped.

"Dropouts. Dickheads. White Trash," Fuckwad mumbles. He is suddenly, perversely lonely for the other kids in the square, who hate him and call him Faggot (when they are tired of calling him Fuckwad) and he is furious with himself because he thinks the lanky shirtless boy on the park bench is a real hottie.

"White Trash?"

"Yeah, White Trash. Why? What'd you call 'em?"

"Not white trash."

"No?"

"Maybe white meat."

Fuckwad flinches. The sun beats down. The air conditioning dries the sweat on Fuckwad's face. The houses thin, as Sabbaday village square gives way to pasture and trailer parks.

Over the road ahead, Fuckwad sees a faint ridge of red on a purpling cloud, like a promise made years ago. He yearns to locate something there in the heavens. He wants this day to have meaning. But "God" is not a label he instinctively applies to these giant feelings that well up inside him from time to time.

He has no language for it. No one he knows speaks of God regularly.

Unless, of course, someone says, "God damn!"

Or, when Fuckwad spies on his mother having sex: "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Or, when Fuckwad sneezes, and someone says, "God bless!" But even this last example is a rarity, since Fuckwad's parsimonious old Yankee grandmother has shortened even that brief phrase to just plain "Bless." She has a touch of terminal emphysema and cannot waste spare breaths on children. (And, moreover, she has a long running dispute with God, because she was supposed to have married a millionaire and moved all the way to Boston and had the wonderful and exciting life as a ballet dancer that she had prayed for when she was a little girl.)

The stalker steals a glance at the boy. Although the stalker would never acknowledge the source of his gift, the Creator has endowed him with a special genius. A genius for boys like Fuckwad. For what they want. For who they are. For their desire to be seen and heard and witnessed and looked at. For the spots of pleasure on their young bodies, and the flush in their hot cheeks, and the twin desires for truth and love

that war in the hearts. Although he is thirty-seven years old, the stalker saw in boys like Fuckwad essentially what God sees -- their motivations and secrets, the aspirations they knew they would never achieve and the cruel triumphs they accepted as recompense.

Back in Boston, the stalker's elderly mother has no appreciation for the gift with which the Creator has endowed her only son. She does not understand where he goes every weekend or the number of hours he spends playing on his computer.

She speaks of a wife and grandchildren. She pages through glossy magazines and clips photos of the men the stalker might have been.

She hopes God takes notice. God, however, has other priorities.

Let me make it clear. I am here to be worshipped, God clarifies. Don't you get it?

Few get it. Most worship other things. In Fuckwad's house, for example, there is the new big screen TV. And Ms. Fuqua's new boyfriend has threatened to break every bone in Fuckwad's body if Fuckwad ever does so much as breathes when he walks by it, for fear the boy will knock it from its stand. In his experience, the threat of violence promotes the most enduring reverence.

Sabbaday, Maine, is not at the end of the earth, but, as Fuckwad's grandmother says, "within plain view." Consequently, radio reception sucks. The stalker hits the Seek button and the numbers scrolls around the dial. It stops at the low end, 88.3, on a country station. It pauses, and then scrolls some more, until it finds a fundamentalist Christian station at 90.1. The stalker does not interfere, so the radio goes back and forth between the station. It lingers a moment before it skips to the other, in restless search for a more powerful signal.

The fragments of the broadcasts compose a serendipitous sermon:

Letters from 1962, underlined in red ... in the Bible, at BibleChallenge.com, that's ... every single I love you. No more loneliness. Only happiness. Love's going to live ... set apart from habitual sin. Whose root cause, as we know, is ... kiss her like an angel this morning; love her like a devil when you get home ... flesh lusts against the spirit. Sanctity is about what we are like when no one sees us

“Alleluia!” the stalker thinks to himself.

God yawns. He is not much for country music or talk radio. God is a rock'n'roller.

Fuckwad has this in common with Him. In his seat next to the stalker, he hums:

*Father of Mine, tell me where have you been?
I just closed my eyes and the world disappeared.
Father of mine, tell me how do you sleep
with the children you abandoned
and the wife I saw you beat.*

His eyes sidle to the stalker's face. Finding incomprehension, Fuckwad's body twitches with sudden delight. In a voice laced with superiority, he explains to the stalker that he and Ms. Fuqua have been setting aside her tips for weeks in order to pay for a paternity test. His father has been denying that Fuckwad is his boy. He says Fuckwad looks too much like his mother. He says Fuckwad's a sissy and there are no sissies in his family.

“My mother'll get the proof,” Fuckwad vows. And then adds confidentially, “I think maybe I should drink a beer. Didn't you say in your email that you had some beer?”

The stalker asks, “What do you think your father is going to do?”

“I don' know. Maybe say he's sorry. I don' know. But I'm not gonna forgive him.”

Fuckwad drains his beer. For a long open moment, he lets his guileless eyes rest on the stalker's face, as if he could extract from it everything he might ever need.

"There's so much I can tell you," he promises, "if you would only ask."

God grows bored and scratches His ass and thereby causes an earthquake registering 4.9 on the Richter scale centered in Plattsburgh, New York. The shock waves reach clear to Sabbaday, Maine, and the shifting earth makes Ms. Fuqua's instinctual uneasiness spill out.

She calls home from work. The answering machine picks up. The hardness of her own recorded voice startles her.

She wonders, *Where is my boyfriend? Where is my son?*

She hangs up and Chief, who has just come into the diner where she works, says, "Hey, doll, what's wrong? You look like you just seen a ghost."

Ms. Fuqua explains, and Chief frowns and tries to convince her that her premonition is nonsense. She is not appeased.

Knowing well her famous temper, Chief mutters, "Well, maybe I can stop by, check it out. After I have my lunch first, all right?"

"Of course," she says, even though she wants her son saved right here and now. "You do that." She thinks Chief is a lazy son-of-a-bitch.

"You look beautiful. You ought to come see me again sometime."

She forces a smile.

"After lunch," he promises again. "I'll check it out for you."

Ms. Fuqua nods. Chief settles on to his regular stool next to the meth dealer, who is drinking black coffee and picking at a Tastee Kake for which he has no appetite.

The loose flesh sways on Chief's cheeks and belly. Ms. Fuqua regrets having fucked him. But at least she never has to worry about another speeding ticket the rest of her life.

Although they do not know it, the kids in Sabbaday Square are hungry for any sign that God takes an interest in their lives. The shirtless boy, for example, is proud of his singular ability to construct a bong from a cored apple, but he truly would like to have something else to boast about and get high on.

God does not spoil His children. *Pick up a Bible, or something, already,* He suggests.

But this is modesty on God's part. In truth, He has not entirely neglected the spiritual needs of the greater Sabbaday community. He has generously placed a wonderful little girl in their midst, the bank teller's daughter. (Yes, the same stupid twat who was keeping her mother from the bathroom that very morning.)

She is sweet. A real saint. She cannot bear cruelty. She is kind and meek and she loves her neighbors more than most. She is precisely the kind of girl who is likely to be date-raped by the pretty shirtless boy in the bandanna within a year or two.

Her name is Celeste. Celeste has a crush on Fuckwad. She had been watching him through his bedroom window for over a month.

But no one has noticed, except Fuckwad, who is gay. And except, of course, for the shirtless boy, who wants to take Celeste down a notch. He loves to poison pure things the same as when he was a little boy and liked to be the first one to make angels in a field of unbroken snow.

He thinks, *Who is Celeste to be so stuck up? She's* (as her mother so aptly put it that very morning) *just a twat.*

Chief asks the kids whether they have seen Ms. Fuqua's boy.

The pretty, shirtless boy drawls, "Fuckwad's a fag."

Some of his laugh track giggle. Celeste blushes. She is wearing tight jeans with flared bottoms, a halter top, and a stud in her nose.

She volunteers, "I seen him this morning. Naw, maybe even an hour back." She points across the Square at the deserted Bijou.

The pretty boy repeats, "Fuckwad's a fag!" but he gets fewer laughs.

"I saw him!" Celeste insists. "I did. He was getting in the car with some guy. Some old guy."

"Put down the crack pipe, slut," the pretty boy quips.

A dreamy eight year old confirms, "She's right. I seen it, too." He is sprawled on the cum-stained mattress in the back of the red pick-up that belongs to one of the kids in the Square boy. He is stoned for the very first time in his brief life.

"You wasn't even here, putz!" the pretty boy snaps.

Chief interrogates Celeste -- a brief description, make and model, the out-of-state plates. Chief remembers the car parked at the roadside that morning. A stone thuds in belly, and he suddenly needs to take a shit.

"You sure?"

"Yeah," Celeste confirms. "He in trouble?"

The pretty boy is jealous that he is no longer the center of attention and he has an urge to kick the stoned kid in the pick-up. He stretches one arm above his head and scratches at the line of hair that disappears beneath his belt.

Chief's eyes settle on the boy's trim waist. They jump away before any of the kids notice.

But God notices. God sees everything. And He well knows that Chief wrestles with flashes of the kids' nakedness and the dreams he has in his patrol car, and the dry mouth that sets on him in summer when the girls (and sometimes the boys) walk by.

Because Chief genuinely cares about these kids, God has rewarded him with a great big discipline. A strong will. To God, this is a full day's work. *What more can be asked of Me?*

Chief, however, is sick and tired of discipline. He wants only to let go. He makes a promise to God that, if only He permits – and forgives – one straying moment, it will never ever happen again. And no one ever needs to find out.

God, however, does not make bargains. God coolly appraises every offering. He stares back in the face of the supplicant, implacable as a Buddha.

The Evergreen Motel sits at the winking light that marks the intersection of the stalker's highway with the business loop through Sabbaday Square. It is run, like so many motels, by an Indian family. God has gifted the Indian race with a prodigious

talent for stiff towels, applying sanitary strips to toilets and bolting down lamps, televisions and any other furniture guests might take a fancy to.

The Indians have rented the stalker a room. They have not blinked at the nervous boy who is his companion. They have perhaps not even seen him. Their view may have been obstructed by the hundred dollar bill with which the stalker paid for the room.

God, however, sees everything, including all activity in the motel room. (Coincidentally, the Indian proprietors can -- if they choose -- also see this activity, because they have illegally installed a nanny-cam in the lampstand, not out of prurient motives but simply to protect their property, after the incident with the meth dealer last year in which he passed out in his room and nearly burnt down the whole motel with a refill bottle of butane.)

This is what the God (and the Indian couple) see:

- Fuckwad slumped in a chair, his knees drawn to his chest, his shoulders huddled.
- A stained blue carpet.
- Curtains stiff with age.
- Dust that makes Fuckwad sneeze. (There's no one to say, "Bless.")
- The stalker on the bed, still fully clothed, telling the boy how beautiful he is.

At first, Fuckwad flinches at the words. Then, deliberately, he approaches the stalker and urges him to say it again. He looks in the mirror as he asks, hoping to tie that precious word -- "beautiful" -- to this skinny body and elfin face he has always known and hated.

"Take off your shirt."

Fuckwad's eyes snap back to the stalker's face. Slowly, Fuckwad untucks the shirt's long tail from his trousers.

A knock sounds on the door.

Fuckwad clutches his shirt to his chest. He thinks: *Someone is about to learn my secret!*

As much as Fuckwad hates being a fag, his secret is the only thing that makes him different from all the trash in Sabbaday, so he can say (and believe), *some day I'll make it out of here!*

"Housekeeping," the proprietor's wife calls out in a sing-song voice. The key turns in the lock, the door opens, and she fills the threshold with her sari.

The stalker kisses Fuckwad full on the lips, and says menacingly, "Go away, you goddamn dot-headed bitch."

She withdraws. Fuckwad opens his mouth as if to protest.

"Shut up," the stalker instructs. He places his hand on Fuckwad's shoulder, his nipple, his chin. Sunlight plays all over the boy's body, and a single drop of sweat runs down between his flat pecs. There is not a hair on his chest, only a faint down on his arm. He is fresh and perfect. And, he is a great and sudden kisser, admitting afterward that he has practiced on Celeste.

In town, Chief assembles a little congregation in his cruiser. Ms. Fuqua's boyfriend weighs a crow bar. He's wearing a Carharrt jacket and a Chevy Hat. The meth dealer's knees bounce like pistons and he touches his dripping nose. He is jonseing hard, and although he tries not to let on, the hallucinations are murder. The bank teller's husband -- Celeste's dad -- growls. He bunches and unbunches his car keys in his hand.

These men are like a church, a ragged set of disparate motivations looking for a name. A label. To justify their very existence here on the planet.

“As God is my witness ... ,” Chief vows. (Men do so love vows.) He fires up the V-8.

“Amen!” says the bank teller’s husband.

“Amen!” echoes Ms. Fuqua’s boyfriend.

“Amen,” says the meth dealer, somewhat feebly.

And the four of them begin to understand they are a chosen people. Which is heady stuff, for men who never thought they might be heroes. Who never thought they were more than trailer trash, and that somebody else would always get the girl.

Ms. Fuqua sees them off. She is furious they won't let her come along. She wrings her hands, which desperately need lotion. She is furious at having to ask for help. It makes her feel worthless and vile. There's nothing in this town she can't handle, not even her own dying mother, but then this God-damned twist of fate sent her way. *Out of the fucking blue. God was fucking with her and wouldn't He ever give it a rest?*

She stares at the same sky that Fuckwad had earlier looked at. She senses the vastness. She has always kept her beliefs to herself, never wanting to force them on her son. But now she wishes she had told Fuckwad more about God, so that he would not be so alone, now, when he needed it. (She is unaware of his having spied on her and heard the "Oh God Oh God" of her orgasm.)

But Fuckwad -- from his spying or otherwise -- has managed to figure out on his own what he believes about the Almighty. For example, he has heretofore imagined that kissing a man would be like kissing God. And so he is disappointed by what has taken

place thus far in the motel room. But he is sweet, too, and he does not want to let on to the stalker, because he does not wish to hurt the stalker's feelings.

The stalker is not nearly so well-intentioned. He has no illusions that he is "helping" Fuckwad come into his own. He does not labor under the suspicion that he would make a good father if it only weren't for the "sex thing".

He just likes boys' bodies. He just likes the conquest. He likes the experience of the sacred he wins from their fear and freshness.

Fuck all the hurt feelings. No one ever cried for me, he thinks.

The stalker's hand plays at the drawstrings of Fuckwad's pants.

Fuckwad sucks in his belly.

Chief's cruiser pulls up in the parking lot.

A blue school bus passes going the opposite way. It is painted with yellow letters that say: Jesus Saves!

Chief sees the stalker's car, and he begins to feel as if God has at last lent him a hand. But it does not feel like the hand of God ought to have felt: powerful, strong, cupped, safe, protected. Like a firm handshake. A man you could trust, and do business with.

Perhaps I have the wrong hand, he thinks. Perhaps I have the wrong God.

Excuse me, my bad. It's hard to operate in the dark.

"How do we know he's got him in there?" the meth dealer asks. "He might have ..."

"I always knew that kid was a God damn fag," the mother's boyfriend remarks.

"He's in there," Chief says. He is certain as a stone. "Believe me, he's in there."

He knows it as well as God himself does.

Chief mutters a prayer, and the meth dealer watches him curiously.

The stalker draws down the boy's pants. The boy is thrilled and afraid.

Chief checks in with the proprietor.

The boy gasps.

"S-s-slow," the boy whispers. He bites the pillow. He really does not want to be here any more.

Chief pulls on a pair of canvas gloves and thinks: *This asshole comes into my town, and steals one of my kids out from under my own nose and thinks he's going to get away with it? Maybe in other towns, or in other states. But not here, not on my watch.*

"What if we're too late?" the meth dealer pesters.

"Shut the fuck up!"

Chief knows it was already too late. He listens at the door marked 9. *It was already too late the moment I did not bust this guy at the side of the road. Already the moment the kids I am responsible for got exposed to this evil son-of-a-bitch. How can God just sit by and watch this happen? That boy will never be right again.*

God is in all things great and small: in Chief's outrage, and Ms. Fuqua's pride, and in the dull ache deep in Fuckwad's belly where, he thinks, he has probably been torn up and wounded.

Fuckwad does not see God in all these things. He is standing naked in the bathroom. He licks a dried crust of semen off his hand and spits the spooge into the toilet. He thinks: *When I kiss my mother tonight, I want my mouth to be clean.*

The stalker sees God only in himself. And in the boy's glory. Fuckwad's smoothness is his smoothness, Fuckwad's blush is his blush, Fuckwad's horniness is his, Fuckwad's goatish smell, his perfect ass, his clumsiness -- all of it belongs now to the stalker. As he draws on his trousers, he feels as if he is going to stumble out of the motel like a newborn foal.

Chief does not see God in all things, either. He steps back to kick down the door.

But God, on the other hand, sees what's in Chief (and in the stalker and in Fuckwad and in everyone else). God sees his paralyzing doubt. Was all Chief's bluster just this secret fear that -- after twelve years on the job surviving on nothing but black coffee, bluff and bravado -- Chief is finally being tested? And that he is likely to fail -- has indeed already failed -- at what has been asked of him?

God toys with Chief. He reminds Chief that the stalker might easily have been him, if he had had the courage. *There but for My grace ...*

"Bust the door!" demands Celeste's Dad.

Chief vows silently: *The boy's mother is lucky she's not here to witness this.*

Fuckwad wonders whether anyone -- other than God -- will be able to see the difference in him. Fuckwad pictures what he will tell his only friend, the other boy he has never met, who is really an old man a thousand miles away.

Coming out of the bathroom, he asks, "Do you think we went too far?"

The stalker shrugs and laces his boots.

Fuckwad tries a second time to move him: “So when am I going to see you again?”

The stalker looks up. “Do you *want* to see me again?”

“Yes.”

“Do you love me?”

“No,” Fuckwad admits. “Not yet.”

A tremendous blow strikes the door like a thunderclap. The stalker is unaccountably flooded with relief. *Not ever*, he thinks, smiling. *You won't ever love me, boy. Sooner or later, you will realize what you are. What I am.*

Another blow splinters the doorframe.

And by tomorrow, the stalker thinks, this will be over. Another moment will have perished. What was true now, might not be so true then. Who ever knew? Who knew if the old man playing the young boy on the internet would even be alive? Who ever knows if any of us will be alive? There are a shitload of errant moose waiting in dark forests to walk in front of you. There are a lot of police chiefs in cars, trying to protect their own, if only to keep them for the possibility of their own private use.

This is how God means for it to be. God sees how close are good and evil. That must be why his rewards do not always seem just.

Fuckwad squeals and darts into the bathroom to hide from these witnesses. His great secret is lost, he is lost. He thinks: *They will know everything!*

Something tectonic moves in the stalker as he witnesses the boy's terror, a slight shifting of emotional plates, a surge of energy. Then flatline again, death.

In the moment before the first fist falls, the stalker sees that his elderly mother will come all the way from Boston. She will sit at his bedside at the hospital, her belongings in string bags that hung at her side like fruits. She will smile and kneel and touch the Jesus around her neck, but she will wonder as she prays: *what have I done that had made God reward me with such a son?*

“Thank God,” Ms. Fuqua says, when Fuckwad is, later, delivered to her arms.
“You’re all right!”

God smiles, and says, *Damn right! About time I got a little gratitude!*

Fuckwad doubts he is all right. Fuckwad doubts God is responsible in any case. Fuckwad folds himself in his mother’s arms and begins to cry, and does not know why he is crying. It is a great big sadness, as if the woes of God have been funneled into his heart. And Fuckwad knows now a sense of vastness, Fuckwad knows now a sense of desolation. He takes no comfort from it, he has not been trained to see it right.

God thinks: *I could make something of this boy.* God sneezes. God forgets.
Someone says, “Bless.”

God is forgotten.

Close your eyes, boy. It never did happen.

Scott D. Pomfret is a lawyer and writer in Boston. His short fiction has appeared in *Genre*, *New Delta Review*, *Fiction International*, *The Long Story*, and numerous other publications. Pomfret is currently at work on a novel.