



The Interrogation of God

by Daniel Charles Ross

photograph by Daniel Vidal

On Christmas Eve, the police interrogation room is still movie-theater dark, lit classically by a single shaded light hanging from the ceiling directly over the table. A single window is heavily shaded and leaks light into the proceedings. The floor tile is ancient and every checkerboard green and was-white square is chipping, scorched here and there by cigarette butts and the odd black cigar fossil back when smoking was still a big thing.

Detective Inspector Douglas Lee Havlichek sits just outside the cone of yellow light. The suspect looks at him with clear, startlingly blue eyes. A persistent, mysterious smile turns up the corners of the man's full lips, creasing a ruggedly handsome face under a shroud of blue-black hair.

It was late. Havlichek was tired, and fatigue streaked his voice.

“Tell me again who you are.”

“I am the Son of Man.”

“What does that mean to you?”

“What does that mean to you, detective?”

Havlichek leans into the light beam, making his craggy, unshaven face look like something from a bad Hollywood production.

“You've seen cop movies, right? Police shows on television, like that?”

“I know of them.”

“Then you know I ask the questions and you provide the answers. So I’ll ask you again, sir. Tell me who you are.”

“I am God.”

Not Jesus, not the Holy-friggin-Ghost, or Holy Spirit they call it today. God Hisownself. No half-steppin’ here. Go big or go home.

“Got any ID about that?”

The man’s grin widens. “I do not, regrettably. I am not often called upon to prove who I am.”

“Then perhaps you can understand my, um, lack of faith, shall I say.”

“It’s at this point that your usual guests will profess their innocence, tell you they know nothing of what has, or will, transpire. I cannot make such a claim,” the man says. He grins again. “I mean, I am something of a know-it-all.”

“You were picked up by …” Havlichek started to say.

“… Officers Smith and Jones. They complain about their pairing because your colleagues tease them that their names are the same as the former television show *Alias Smith and Jones*, a cowboy program that ran on ABC from 1971 to 1973. Officer Smith is a rookie. Officer Jones has seventeen years on the job. His mother is unwell. I have seen her.”

His voice is somehow like deeply honeyed music. “She will be with Me soon.”

“Well, I guess that’s good news and bad news, huh? I’ll be sure to pass the word. Or is that *The Word?*” The man doesn’t react to Havlichek’s weak attempt at humor. “So, in your own words, why did Smith and Jones arrest you on Christmas Eve?” Havlichek leans in on his folded arms.

The man doesn’t hesitate. “I was in the area of Mack and St. Jean, addressing holiday pleadings, when the Korean check-cashing place was robbed. I know I look like the man who robbed this place. Officers Smith and Jones rightfully and legally detained me for identification, but as I have none by common standards, I was arrested and brought here until my identity could be established.”

“Well done. Exactly right,” Havlichek says. “How do you intend to prove to me who you say you are?”

The man stirs. “I have created a series of documents that testify to who I am. Please reach into my right-hand pocket and withdraw the envelope you will find there.”

Havlichek sits upright in his institutional chair, head cocked to one side like a dog listening to sounds too high for human hearing. How does this guy have anything in any pockets, Havlichek wonders? Smith and Jones are good cops. They have searched this man quite effectively.

“Okay, I’ll play.” Havlichek rises from his chair, comes around the table and reaches into the man’s right-hand coat pocket. His fingers close on an object. He removes an envelope, good paper, high rag count, with a heavy, homemade texture like paper mache, tied with a red ribbon. Havlichek pulls apart the bow and empties the contents of the envelope onto the table. He knows the cops are watching and will be goggle-eyed at what Havlichek has found.

“Birth certificate. Place of birth, Bethlehem. Not the Pennsylvania one. Michigan driver’s license, current, but funny. It seems you live at my address.”

“I needed a street address. I have none in the conventional sense, of course, and stating that I live in your heart seemed tactless. But the point is to prove to you who I am. If I was making documents anyway, how better to prove my identity? So I used your address.”

“How do you know my address?”

Now it’s the man’s head that angles to one side, a smile hovering above his lush beard.

“Ah. When did you make these?”

“A moment before you asked for them. I knew you would ask. I didn’t want to seem eager.”

“You made these. On the spot, with your hands clasped together on the table. Cops didn’t just miss ’em.”

“I’m not one to boast.”

Havlichek’s patience wore thin. “Okay, ‘God,’ riddle me this: Pediatric cancer. AIDS. Heroin. War.” Havlichek takes a deeper breath because he doesn’t know how to stop. He raises his hand and ticks off on his fingers. “Divorce. Alcoholism. Homicide. Fucking ISIS assholes, burning people alive in cages! Child molestation—by *priests*?”

Smith enters the room. "Got a call, boss. Bad one. Askin' for you."

Havlichek fixes the bearded man in a hard stare, then tells Smith, "He can go."

"Thank you, detective."

"Merry Christmas. Happy Birthday. Whatever, I gotta run." Havlichek swings toward the door.

Behind him, the melodic voice says, "You're going to a domestic, downtown. A man shot his wife. It's okay, I caught her. The husband is in the back of Officer O'Brien's patrol car. His hands are cuffed behind him."

Havlichek turns and faces the man.

"He has a Kel-Tec three-eighty in the small of his back. O'Brien missed it."

The detective freezes. Without turning his head, Havlichek says to Smith, "Call that tidbit down to O'Brien, just for grins." A few minutes later, Smith pokes his head back in the room and just nods.

"I still gotta go, but thanks."

The man nods and smiles. "See you when I see you."