

## HEY I'M JESUS

James Bussell

When my bottle turned from clear to red, my ex shook his head n threw up ovah the railin into the Charles. I patted his spiny back as his vomit fell down like Rapunzel's hair. When he finished spewin, he looked at me, his eyes with red barbs through em, n said I mustah got an STD n I'm a cheatin ho. I couldn't explain why my watah turned red. I grabbed his sleeve n tried tellin him no, I've been loyal, but he karate-chopped my arm n ran off like a bitch to Charles/MGH. My hand was shakin, spillin drops on my wrist. I sniffed. I remembered the smell from Eucharist as a kid: the mix of skin n *wine*. I took a taste. I was right—the water had turned to wine. I didn't know how. Still don't really. Just knew I wasn't in a relationship no mah.

Then, in the summah, I walked on the shallows in the Cape. I didn't mean to. It was like steppin on the Frog Pond rink: solid instead of liquid. This big guy saw me n fainted on someone's sun-umbrellah.

In the fall, when I hugged my cousin Monica, she started seein. The family was rocked, mosta all Monica, born blind. My family called it a miracle, they praised Jesus, wrote checks to charities, but none of them called it *my* miracle. None of 'em thought I had a hand. I thought, maybe I didn't? Maybe Monica just stopped bein blind.

Later in the fall, my uncle, Monica's dad took me out fishin with my cousins, includin Monica, who was no longah at risk of fallin in. When we got out into the bay, bluefin tuna started jumpin inna the charter boat. Each bluefin, accordin to Uncle, is ovah 200LBS, so the deck was clatterin

with muscle, like thunder. Weight was addin up quick. Everybody ducked cos the tuna were flyin over the boat like artillery n the captain was screaming

Duck! Get down!

Get on the deck, woman!

But I stood still.

Felt sure none of the tuna were gonna jump inta me.

Felt sure they were jumpin *cos of* me.

I was finally realizin *I* might be Jesus.

I needed confirmation with a lowercase c. Tagged along to Sunday Mass with my ma. She said she was gonna go anyway. Durin the homily, Jesus' eyes started glowin on the crucifix, like St Sebastian's in *Carrie*. The pastor got a big applause. He wept. Red n sniffin, he carried on, his voice now echoin around. I had lotsah questions, none the pastor could help with

WHAT'S GOD WANTIN FROM ME?

GOD CHOSE AN ATHEIST FROM A FAMILY OF BAD CATHOLICS TO BE THE NEW JESUS?

JESUS NOW HAS A VAGINA?

I wanted to tell someone, but couldn't take the risk. Last time people in the Northeast thought women had powers, they burned, hanged, or drowned em. Had to be Jesus in secret.

All my miracles so far were accidents. Needed to know if I could do somethin on purpose. So I signed up as a volunteer for Boston Children's.

Brings me to now: ridin the T inna town for my first shift.

A floatin clipboard is right in my face, tellin me where to go—then I’m in a big room with six beds, like stumblin inna summer camp, but instead of names carved in the bed frames, there’s tubes snakin em. The kids wail n scream as I come in. I ask if they want me to read to them, like the job description says, but the four boys just wanna know my life, know if I gotta boyfriend, my job, what’s my boss like, what my best friend’s like, what kind of car I drive, everything. They think workin at a bagel store sounds fun. Dunno what sounds fun about it. While I talk I’m hopin they rip the tubes out their arms n bolt out of beds, runnin round, bald heads catchin sunlight, feelin like their insides have changed, knowin they’re cured. But nah, nothin. I wonder if I gotta touch them, but how could I do that? Guess I needa wait for anothah session when it wouldn’t be so weird to touch their hands. But I can’t wait too long, cos, well.

The clipboard says it’s now my break. I sit on one of the two chairs between big pot plants flappin under the AC, which sounds like a Harley. Guy with a diamond vest sits beside me. Wire glasses, way too old for him. He looks at me like a test subject. It’s hot.

Hi.

He reaches out his hand. I shake it n I ask

Are you a doctor?

He puffs up his tie, so I can see it.

No. A medical scientist.

What’s the difference?

Doctors make patients better. I make  
doctors better.

You're from outta town.

I'm from Georgia.

You don't sound like you're from  
Georgia. Where in Georgia?

Macon. East of Columbus.

You eat lotsa peaches?

You eat *lotsa* lobsters?

You think you're smaht?

I'm a medical scientist and professor.

And I'm Jesus.

Pardon me?

Makin fun of you.

The joke's already on me. I  
graduated with my PhD six years ago  
and all the same diseases remain  
incurable.

Six years ain't long.

It's too long for these guys.

What are you lookin for?

Essentially a miracle. Like an  
undiscovered drug inside the stem of  
a plant under a gorilla's ass in the  
Congo Basin. Until then, most of my  
work is making curable things more  
curable, and incurable things more  
tolerable.

You need miracles?

Sure as hell do.

I fold my hands on my jeans. The denim is boiling.

His knees clack togethah like croquet mallets.

Who's your favorite? he asks.

Favorite what?

Kid.

He tucks in his elbows, touches his nails, n says

Mine's Usman.

Usman?

Room 4C.

Maybe you haven't met him yet.

Nah I ain't.

Are you treating him?

Told you. I'm not a doctor. This is  
my lunch hour.

You're a volunteer?

Is that so weird?

The clipboard tells us to go back to work.

Usman's bed looks like a dead spidah, each limb goin somewhere different—a clear bag of fluid, to the heart monitah, to a helium balloon. It's hard to see the kid underneath. The otha boy, Romeo his placard says, has his curtain half-drawn. Guess I'll be readin to myself, then. I grab the beaten-up *Don Quixote*: maybe something they gotta read for English, if these guys have to try keepin up with school.

The spine creaks when I lift the covah. On cue, a mini basketball pops out from behind the curtain n crosses the room. I can't see where it goes, but I hear the clap of it getting caught. Then Usman leans up. For all the wires around his bed, only one is attached to him: to his left wrist. So he throws the ball with one hand—to me. I catch it. The curtain-rail rattles as the curtain draws back. I see Romeo. Both boys got dull skin, not enough sunlight. They don't look at me. Just stretching, breathing loud, n getting more creative with how they throw. They're like two flowers. We throw around the ball silently. The thick book stays open on my lap. I'm thinkin of what to say, narrowin down, when the curtain rattles again.

The curtain is back, Romeo is gone.

I look at Usman n ask

What's wrong?

Usman shushes me.

The ball is gripped in his right hand. He props it between his shins, points at Romeo, n clasps his hands together: Romeo's prayin. I cross my legs n do nothin. A minute later, Romeo pulls back the curtain n says thanks. He's got peach-fuzz on his upper-lip.

Usman explains that he's Christian but Romeo's Muslim, n has to pray at noon, n likes it to be quiet when he prays. Romeo is lookin out the window at the Hancock Tower. Without lookin at me, he asks if I think it looks like a PS4, n I say yeah it does. Who am I to him, I wonder? What does his religion make of me? Tellin Usman n Romeo I'm a Catholic, I ask Romeo if he believes in Jesus.

Isa al-Masih, the prophet.

Yes, we believe.

Isa, is she a girl?

*A he.*

Isa, did he do miracles?



Allah did miracles through him.

Usman kicks the ball off his bed n says

Why you asking about miracles?

I needa change the subject.

Wonderin how they work.

Want a miracle myself.

What miracle?

Want the Celtics to win, I say.

The boys snicker.

Romeo **says**

We don't need a miracle for that. We need to trade Marcus Smart.

I like Marcus Smaht.

Usman **says**

Is your accent real?

This is how my family talks, yeah.

I thought only construction workers talk like that.

I shrug.

At my high school, everyone talked like this.

Usman **says**

It's a good accent.

Romeo **says**

Yes. It's cool.

The shift ends at 1:30 n I haven't healed anyone.

But I'll be back next week on Wednesday.

Not easy makin bagels when you're Jesus Christ. Or Isa al-Masih. Everyone wants an everythin bagel with hot smoked salmon n capers n cream cheese or bacon n dijonnaise n pickled cabbage. Everyone n their ma wants dill. Can't stand it when the customers side-eye me waitin for their orders to get done—I'm fast, they want fastah.

I got the medical scientist's business card heating up in my back pocket.

Dunno if I can trust him.

But do I gotta choice? How many people are gonna die cos I'm slicin doughnut-shaped bread instead a doin miracles? If it's possible to turn my miracles into *medicine*, shouldn't I, even if I might end up becomin a famous loony, or get myself locked inside a scientist's cage?

My boss's voice cuts through my ear.

I need an over-medium egg with feta  
& avocado & aioli & parsley &  
added dill, says my boss.

Added dill.

That cardboard rectangle is getting hottah in my back pocket. I can imagine that frail Georgia  
nerd, forehead in his hands, tryna figah out the reason why some experiment did somethin it  
shouldnta. The smile on his face if I bursted in n proved I can make the blind see. I'd have to  
find a way to prove it. But I don't gotta walk in n say

I'm Jesus Christ.

What didya say?

Hey can you please get that first  
order started? Remember, added  
dill—

the customer's got four kids and I  
think if we forget his dill he's going  
to literally snap  
also I need an order of bacon chili  
lettuce with extra avocad

The card is burning a hole through my ass cheek.

I think of each of the kids. That's just one floor of one children's hospital in one city. Needa figure out what my body can do.

My boss is lurking over my shoulder. He says,

Woah. That's incredible.

I realize, on my chopping board, there's nine rings.

I've managed to slice through the bread eight times.

The knives are barely sharp enough to make one clean cut.

My boss raps the counter.

Dunno what you're doing.

Probably start those orders.

But that's incredible.

I've never seen that before.

God, that's incredible.

Maybe I could start selling stacks!

You know, multiple-layer things?

Could call it the Boston Triple

Decker. No, no, that's stupid.

Because—how many is that? —nine

layers, so I'd need a name that

evokes that many layers, like the

Pyramid. I dunno. That's silly, too.

God, I think the guy with the kids is  
about to snap.

I literally think he's about to snap  
and kill us all.

You okay? You got two orders. Hey,  
what's up? Where are you going?  
Hey, it's not your break. Hey! You're  
still wearing your apron! Hey, you're  
gonna leave right now when this guy  
is literally about to sna—

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]