

Black Rhino

“Have a nice day.” That innocuous, reflexive sendoff was the last thing Harry heard before all hell broke loose. Well, probably not hell itself—Harry had spent long enough in Catholic school that he expected at least a small spike in temperature when the world ended—but something damn close to it. The woman who’d flicked that little goodbye his way disappeared behind the counter as the first bullet slid its way into her shoulder. At the time, Harry assumed it was a bullet, but, being a true McCormick, Harry fled the scene before he knew for sure.

No shots rang out after him, not that he heard, but the hairs on the back of his neck stood up in anxiety as he pushed out the Plexiglas doors. The hairs on his whole body, actually, which might have struck him as passing strange if he hadn’t been fleeing in terror. His Bud Light and Sports Illustrated forgotten inside MAIN STREET CONVENIENCE, Harry doglegged through the parking lot, almost empty at this time of night.

“Serpentine,” he told himself quietly, already panting. “Serpentine,” he repeated, as he ran straight for the open road. A quiet hum issued from where he thought the doors might be behind him, and the hand of some guardian angel shoved his head down. In his heavy-breathed delusion, Harry thought he saw the bullet zipping over him across the highway, a high thin yellow blur. He swore in a way he thought might cost him another shove from whatever unfortunate screw-up God had assigned to his case.

Still running, Harry began a Hail Mary somewhere around the dotted yellow of Highway 9, but quickly switched it up. No offense meant to the sacred mother, but he figured in this situation he might want to go straight to the big guy. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy – damn!” A burn appeared in the ground inches from his left foot, left behind by a

skidding and somehow sparkless bullet. He didn't risk a glance over his shoulder, but cast a shout back the way of the bullet. "Whatever I did, man – I didn't do it!"

Silence replied. Harry kept running, but began to feel a stitch in his side. "Jesus, if you're listening, I'll get the gym card." Another bullet, this one close enough to feel the heat and hear the hum. "Not just the free trial, man, I'll pay for this one!" Gripping a nonexistent cross, he cycled through his go-to prayers as he reached the woods cut back from the 9's far side. "I can't remember the whole Glory Be, but it's the thought that counts right?"

When he took the spill, only a few minutes later, Harry McCormick was on the eight or nine words he could recall from the Prayer of Saint Francis. Somewhere around "something else about vessels," his foot hit a root.

As Harry would opine to his eager listeners over the next few days, if the shooter had been even halfway competent, he'd have killed his prey then, prone on the nettled wet ground. Instead, when Harry finally rolled over, having felt the eyes that bored through his skull approach, he found himself looking at his attacker.

The man was armored in gleaming green, what looked like a full set of steel plate, and white light with no perceptible origin lined the joints. His face, perfectly and beautifully symmetrical, was creased in confusion. Harry's first thought was that he knew now why his prayers hadn't been working. It hadn't been Hell, not Capital-H anyway, but that was coming for sure. This was an angel of God himself, sent to track down an erstwhile sinner. The angel gazed down at him, that lovely glowing face lined in concern. Concern directed, Harry was sure, at Harry's own eternal soul. The angel carried what looked like a gun in his hands, but it dropped to his waist before he spoke.

“Shit.” The hand not on the angel’s gun ran up to his head and streaked back his pale hair. “You’re not Harry McClintock.”

Now Harry frowned. “Uh, Mc... Cormick.”

“Oh, goddamn it.” The gun dangling on a clip at his waist, the angel threw his hands in the air. “Not a-fucking-*gain*.” He clicked his tongue, and sat down beside Harry, who in turn levered himself into a seated position. The angel turned its head to Harry. “I’m gonna get *very* fired.” Even to Harry’s not-so-keen ear, this foulmouthed angel seemed clearly to be from Brooklyn.

This was a new deep end for Harry, who wasn’t quite sure whether he should be running still or consoling the shimmering would-be assassin beside him on the dirt.

“...no... no you, you aren’t gonna get... uh... fired.” Coughing, Harry forced himself to ask, “what... uh...” he swallowed, “What are you?”

“What?”

In a whisper wholly inappropriate for their isolation, Harry followed up. “Do you work... for Jesus?”

“What? No. I’m from Flatbush.” He paused, and seemed to realize some duplicity. “Well, uh, in 2162.”

“The future.” Harry’s ability to call bullshit was somewhat limited by his first guess, but he’d give it a try nonetheless, hypocrisy be damned. “Bullshit.”

The non-angel seemed to have picked up on the same limitation. “Dude, you thought I was Jesus.”

“Uh...” Harry waved his hands noncommittally. “I thought you... *worked* for Jesus.”

Greg Burton

“Uh-huh.” The future Brooklynier sighed. Looking over at Harry, he threw a hopeful dart.
“You didn’t, by any chance, kill the last Black Rhino?”

“Sorry man.”

“Shit. Welp,” the hunter-hunter said, lifting himself off the ground and wiping dirt off of his glimmering armor, “I’m gonna take that beer you bought if you don’t mind.” He walked off, glowing and muttering to himself about spellcheck. Harry slumped against the tree, wondering whether it would be rude to take some beers for himself from MAIN STREET CONVENIENCE. Given his recent conversations with the deity, he decided against.