

A Bassoon Lite, Please Not Ronnie

By Alan Goodman

I spoke to GOD last night. He called me on the phone... woke me up from a deep sleep. Actually, my wife answered the phone. It's on her side of the bed. When it rang, she just reached out and mumbled something into the receiver. It could have been "Hello", but then again it could have been "Go away".

My wife isn't too articulate at two o'clock in the morning.

She dropped the receiver down on the floor near her nightstand, rolled over and shook me.

I was irritable. Snoring is something I've gotten used to. The cat, walking along my chest doesn't bother me like it used to. Shaking, though, irritates me.

"Phone." Came from under the blanket where she had buried herself.

"Who is it?" I mumbled to the blanketed woman alongside me.

"GOD." Her muffled voice notified me. "Let me sleep," she added, "...talk to HIM inna' other room. I'll hang up here when you get it."

I threw off the warm covers and padded off into the den. There, I picked up the phone sitting on my desk.

"Hello?" I croaked into the receiver.

"Hello." The voice was deep. Very deep.

"Who is this?" I glanced at the clock on the wall. It indicated the time as two o'clock.

"GOD..." the voice said, "I hope this isn't a bad time to call. I've been busy all day. This is the first chance I've had to get to a phone."

I had to smile, "Hey Ronnie...is this you? What the Hell are you doing calling me at two in the morning? Don't you ever go to sleep? Look, I've got to get some shuteye. Let me call you back tomorrow. I promise."

"This is not Ronnie." The voice responded very matter-of-factly.

"No??" I said, "Then who is it?"

"GOD," the deep voice said.

"GOD?" I responded, turning the phrase over slowly in my sleepy mind.

"Yes...GOD. Didn't the lady who answered tell you? I mentioned it to her first thing."

"Yes," I answered. "Of course. How forgetful of me. She did say something like that." The thought crossed my mind that I was still sleeping, that I was in the middle of a dream. I began to regret sneaking in that giant root beer float just before I had come up to bed.

"So...GOD." I said somewhat groggily, "What can I do for you?"

"The new bassoon I ordered arrived from the manufacturer earlier today. I just now opened the crate," GOD said, "... I'm having a hard time figuring out how it goes together. I thought I'd call a professional and get some help."

I cradled my head in my free hand, "Ronnie! This has to be you. Look I'm exhausted. I told you I'll call you back tomorrow." I hung the phone up on the hook.

It rang again... immediately. I picked it up in mid-ring, "Hello?"

"I told you," the voice said, "... this is not Ronnie. Don't hang up on me again...That is a COMMANDMENT!"

The voice spoke with authority. The guy had sound effects too. I could hear all kinds of rumbling in the background. Sounded just like a thunder and lightning storm. I peeked out my window expecting to see rain. The stars glittered. It was a clear night.

I scratched my head...rubbed my eyes with two fingers of my left hand.

"OK GOD," I said, "I'm listening. You were saying, you don't know how to put your new bassoon together,"

I tried to sound sympathetic.

The rumbling stopped. The voice spoke again... calmer this time.

"That's right," GOD said, "I would appreciate some help. You shall be amply rewarded for your assistance. I assure you."

I thought to play along, "OK...er...GOD. How many pieces of bassoon do you have there in front of you?"

"Four pieces...plus some bent pipes." The voice answered.

"Sounds about right," I said. I felt a little stupid, but I thought to humor the guy a while longer. I thought of ways to get even with that prankster, Ronnie. When I got my hands on him I would wring his neck for this. "Pick up the boot out of the case..."

GOD interrupted me, "... I don't see any boots in the case, anywhere!"

"Look...ah...GOD," I was solicitous in my response, "may I ask why somebody as ...ah...powerful and ...ah...all knowing as yourself doesn't know how to put a bassoon together?"

I just wanted to get back to bed.

"You think being all knowing is easy?" He responded indignantly, "How would YOU like to go through life knowing everything? The phone constantly ringing off the hook...everyone wanting favors...it's no picnic..."

GOD was starting to sound agitated.

He continued, "I needed a diversion...something unfathomable...different. I decided to look for something that presents a challenge...something that even I, can't figure out. It took me quite a while before I found a picture of this...this...." GOD seemed to falter searching for just the right word, "... bassoon thing in a catalogue. Once I made my decision, I couldn't wait to place my order. That was two years ago. You don't know how I've anticipated this moment. That's why I had to call an expert. The

bassoon arrived in a crate at the Pearly Gates by special courier just this morning.”

“Wait a minute, GOD. Let me get this straight,” I was perplexed, “You said you’ve been waiting TWO YEARS for your order to be filled for this bassoon?”

“Yes. Two long years,” the voice rumbled.

“Didn’t you tell the manufacturer that you were GOD when you placed your order?” I asked, “Surely, they would have shipped the bassoon out to you sooner if they had known that.” My eyelids were drooping. Tomorrow was going to be a long day, I thought.

“That would have been a nice gesture,” the voice responded, “...but the people I talked to at the factory told me they didn’t care if I was the principal bassoonist in the Philadelphia Orchestra...I would have to wait my turn like everyone else.”

I responded with genuine sympathy, “I know what you mean. Now look...GOD. The boot is that fat piece with two holes running down into it.” All I wanted was for the voice to get his bassoon together so I could hang up and go back to sleep.

“Oh yes. I see it. I’m holding it...what next?” The voice sounded enthusiastic, almost like a kid under the tree, Christmas morning.

“Uh..” I roused myself from falling forward onto my desk before continuing. I was going to kill Ronnie with my bare hands for this. “OK...ah...GOD. The narrow piece with a kind of hollow side to it is called the tenor joint. Pick that up and place it into the smaller hole on top of the boot. Then put the long piece alongside it into the larger hole.”

“Wow!” He exclaimed, “This is something else! Looks bizarre! Just what I had hoped for...I must say!”

GOD seemed to be having a good time putting his bassoon together.

“Alright GOD. Hang in there, we’re not done yet. Now pick up the bell and stick it on top ...” the voice interrupted me.

“Bell?? Bell? I don’t see any bells. I’ve got just another piece of wood here.” GOD sounded irritated, “No bells anywhere in sight...”

“That’s fine...” I assured him, “Don’t panic. The piece of wood with either a white or a metal ring on one end is called the bell. Put that onto the top of the longest section, the bass joint.”

“Wow. This is something!” He said excitedly into the phone.

I thought this had to be Ronnie. Nobody else was crazy enough to wake me up at two in the morning for a practical joke. Nobody!

I continued my instructions, “OK...GOD, now take a crook and put it in the small hole of the...”

He jumped in, indignant. “Crooks are not allowed into Heaven. I assure you, rumors to the contrary, we have no crooks here!”

I sat listening to his response. Poor GOD, I thought. How very dull it must be up in Heaven with such strict admission requirements.

“Please listen, GOD,” I cautioned, “Listen carefully. The

crook is the name for the bent metal pipes that are in the bottom of the case.”

I looked at the clock. TWO THIRTY!!! I had been at this for a full half-hour.

I mentioned my problem staying awake to GOD. I was relying on His compassion regarding my need for sleep. “So GOD. Now that the bassoon is together, I’m going to hang up. If I don’t get to sleep, I’m going to fall over.”

“Oh, yes. Yes. I’m so sorry to keep you up like this,” He said mercifully; “By all means go back to sleep.”

“Thank you...ah...GOD. Nice talking to you,” I responded, “Good luck with your bassoon. Good night.” I hung up before the voice could say anything more.

The phone rang immediately. I picked up before it had rung more than an instant, “WHAT??? WHAT?” I said irreverently into the receiver, “Give me a break. WHAT IS IT NOW?”

“This is GOD again,” the deep voice said.

“Really?” I responded sarcastically, “I thought maybe it was Santa Claus.”

“No. It’s not Santa Claus,” said the voice, “It’s still GOD.”

“OK GOD. What can I do for you?” My patience had disappeared.

“I have only one more question and then I’ll let you go. I want you to know I really appreciate your help.” I figured that strangling Ronnie was going to be to good for him.

“OK GOD. One more question. I’m ready. Go ahead,” I said.

“Now that the bassoon is together,” He began, “please tell me, what does one do with it? What does it mean?”

I heaved a heavy sigh into the phone and vowed I would get even with Ronnie. “I’m sorry GOD. That’s one question I’m unable to answer. As a matter of fact, everyone always tells me that ‘GOD only knows’.”

“I guess what this really means,” I sighed into the receiver, “... is that NOBODY knows what it means. If you figure it out, though GOD, please call me back. I’m just dying to know... Goodnight”

Before the phone could ring again, I dialed Ronnie’s number. His wife, sleepy and sounding irritated answered. I asked to speak to Ronnie.

In a vengeful mood, I told her GOD was calling. Unimpressed, she told me Ronnie was still asleep and wasn’t interested in talking to GOD at the moment. She suggested GOD call back at a more reasonable hour. She hung up before I could say anything more.

I was perplexed. If it wasn’t Ronnie...then who, I wondered, was it? Too tired to worry over the matter any longer I got up from the desk. Reaching out for the light, I glanced at the clock.

It said two o’clock.

Not until I had pulled the covers over me and was dozing off did I realize that, according to my clock, not one second had gone by since I first took the call from GOD.

“Not one second,” I mused.

Sleep came quickly. ❖