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By Bob Muhlnickel

1
So there is no place safe from this sharp-edged pebble resting behind my eyes. What then?

If I could, I would bring suit against my life, and trail behind the lawyers into court; my life handcuffed to the bailiff who stands around waiting to begin.

2
By afternoon proceedings are in disarray. My life stands, shouting that I should be convicted for having lived it; I plead not guilty, claiming this suit as my first attempt to live my life.

"I have never lived you before! Always some pale stranger walked in front of me, creating my life; before I could catch up, I was one step behind."

The court, never having had this sort of thing done before, waited and watches while yellow dogs in from the street, run yelping at justice, scattering papers, briefcases and spectators high in the air.

"I wouldn't bomb innocent people."
"The only innocent are the dead," his father stated.

"What kind of a God would let such things happen?"
"I said the same thing when I was young. When you're old like me, you'll understand."

"I'll never understand," Michael said. He glanced at the article about the tortures used on the Vietnamese. Shaking his head, he went upstairs to his room. The crucifix was still on the wall, but Michael had hung an End the War Now poster next to it.

"Haven't you seen the photos of the children burning alive? We drop napalm on people!" he shouted to his geometry teacher, Mr. Vacu.

"So what are you going to do, go to Canada?" Mr. Vacu shouted back.

Michael had seen Life pictures of the tiger cages and the burned bodies in the hospitals. Mrs. Von Zychler made a collage of them and posted it on her bulletin board. She taught Western civilization during third period where they spent several days discussing atheism in class. "The gods can either lead away evil from the world and not, or being willing to do so cannot, or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are both willing and able. If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can but will not, then they are not benevolent. If they are neither willing nor able, then they are neither benevolent nor omnipotent. Lastly, if they are both willing and able to annihilate evil, how does it exist?" Miss Von Zychler read from Epicurus. "Your assignment for next week is to write a four-page critique of this statement."

"Why is it a sin to think of sex?" he asked Jeff.

"Because the Church doesn't want anyone to have any fun," Jeff responded. "I've never understood how you can still believe in that stuff. Face it! Everyone does what he wants and usually gets away with it."

"I'm sick and tired of feeling guilty every time I look at a girl. Anything to do with sex is a sin. That's all the priests talk about."

"Yeah, then after bombing children Nixon has an audience with the Pope," answered Jeff.

"You boys will have to be quieter or leave," the librarian warned. They turned back to their reading.

Spring arrived and Michael stopped going to church regularly. The war continued and Michael continued to talk and read as much as he could about the Vietnam war and, most of all, the anti-war protesters here. He lay in his room thinking, then went downstairs to get the mail. He raced upstairs with the latest Newsweek in hand. Vietnam, again, he thought. The magazine had photos of the burned, maimed children in Saigon hospitals. "15,000! 15,000 children burned!" he screamed. He looked upward at the crucifix.

"No more. No more killing. What kind of a God are you?" he demanded as he fell to his knees. I'm not guilty. I'm not. No more wars. No God would let people suffer like this," he sobbed into his pillow, "because there is no God."

After dinner, Michael climbed slowly to his room. He gazed at the crucifix upon the wall.

"No more," he whispered as he reached up, "it's over." Holding the crucifix in his hand, he felt the crack more than he had ever felt it before. He walked down to the basement and there, in the large cardboard box which contained the other moments of his childhood, he placed the crucifix.