

On the Fifth Level

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So I'm wandering around the Macy's parking garage on about the fifth level, when I see this nice-looking guy in his late forties; dark grey Marc Anthony suit, Thom McCann shoes—looked kind of like Denzel. Anyway, he's upset, screaming into his iPhone.

I ask him what's wrong, if I can help. He says he's on the phone with God. He says he's been on hold all afternoon and now he finally got through and he has to holler because God is almost completely deaf, you know, because She's so old. Then, I guess, God comes back on the phone, because he forgets about me and starts yelling again. "I can't take this any more," he bawls. "This life, this bullshit job selling insurance. I want more, different, not this woman—she's not the same one I married; she doesn't even like me any more and—you know—I can't stand her! And I don't like you much either." I can't believe he actually has the balls to talk to the Almighty like this.

He stops, breathless, and God must have said something I couldn't hear, because the guy says "Oh, I can't calm down; I don't want to calm down. You cheated me—You're a cheater. I always, always! wanted to play pro football and you made me five-foot-seven. Then you had me born to these churchy people; my mother made me take piano, not football. For eight years! Eight of the best years of my life! They even left me the freakin' piano when they passed. I never touch it. My wife dusts it. No, don't think you can apologize now; it's too late, God, just...too...late!"

And he collapses on the filthy floor of the fifth level of Macy's garage, sobbing into his Wall Street Journal, snot dripping from his nose onto the iPhone, then quietly he says, "Don't leave God, oh please don't leave me." But God has broken the connection. The guy sighs and shudders. I'm embarrassed at having come upon him, a perfect stranger, at such an intimate moment. I give him three Kleenex and a little sample bottle of Purell hand sanitizer I find in the bottom of my purse.

He looks up at me. The lines of grief in his face make him look a thousand years old. "Are you okay?" I say, "Do you think you can drive yourself home?" He nods, then shakes his head. "I don't know why I bother; She never listens when I call."