

Punched By An *Angel*



Ryan Gray

Part Two

I sat on the edge of the bed, showered, and ready to leave - when allowed to do so by my new handler, Denzin. But, I had to first wait; I didn't know why, just that I had to wait. The night before, I had a massive fight with my wife, culminating in me leaving the house with nothing but an overnight bag. It had begun with me selling the new car, then discussing cheaper alternatives for our children's education, and downgrading our house so we could have more money in the budget for missions and sponsoring orphans. However, all of those sacrifices seemed manageable in my wife's eyes. Manageable, this is until I mentioned the last bit of news. The latest command from my new 'friend' and worst enemy, Denzin: A command that violated all modern reason and good sense.

"Housekeeping." A voice and knock at the door interrupted my thoughts.

I sighed. "Here we go," I thought aloud before speaking up, "Come in."

The door opened, and a plump Latina woman rolled her cleaning cart into the room. "Oh, mister, I am sorry; please excuse. I come back."

"No, it's fine, Ma'am. I was just leaving." I smiled, hoping I had permission to leave the bed.

Awkwardly the cleaner complied and got to work.

"Ask her!"

I rolled my eyes at the voice.

"Ask her!"

"SHH!" I hushed Denzin, "You're so obnoxious sometimes. Just give me a minute."

"Excuse me, sir, did you say something?" The cleaner asked.

"Oh, no, sorry, I was just..." I whined a tiny bit on the inside but complied with the voice whispering in my ear, "Actually, I have a question for you, Ma'am...what's your name?"

"Maria."

"Maria, I am so sorry to be intrusive, but I must ask." I sighed loudly, ending with a moan. I knew how crazy I would sound; finally, I asked, "Is there something wrong?"

"Excuse me?" The lady replied.

"I know it's weird, but..." She cut me off.

"Gloria A Dios!" Maria gripped a small crucifix hanging from her neck and looked up smiling. "I was told He would bring me the answer today." Tears swelled in her eyes.

My jaw dropped. "He did?"

"Se, mister, He said I would meet a man with the answer."

"The answer to what?"

"My sister outside of Teauhana runs an orphanage with two hundred children. But they will lose their building, the owner wants to sell, and they don't have the money to buy it."

"Let me guess. Your sister needs 650,000 dollars, doesn't she?"

"How did you know that? Do you know who I need to speak to?"

A deep frown marred my face, "Yes." I whined out.

"Who, senior?" Maria begged, hope in her eyes.

I winced hard, my lip quivering, then I whined even louder, "Me!"

Denzin plopped down on the bed next to me, "Wow, looks like we are going to Mexico! Amazing!"

"That was everything we had saved for the past 12 years for our retirement! And because of all the fees and taxes, I had to cash out much more than the \$650,000." My eyes bulged from my skull, lecturing the translucent being next to me, "My financial adviser fired me as a client!" I put a hand on my hip, "He's never done that before...and he goes to my church!"

Denzin grinned then shrugged, "So?"

"He'll tell everyone!"

"I know he will." He punched me lightly on the shoulder, "Isn't it awesome?" Denzin was almost bouncing up and down in the security line next to me at the airport. He was far too excited, almost bursting at the seams.

"She's going to kill me." I hissed at the apparition: an apparition determined to plague my nice comfortable life.

"Who's that?" Denzin inquired, a grin still adorning his face.

"My wife, she is going to kill me." I took a step closer to the security check. A young couple was behind me, and a mom with a little girl was in front of me; the little one was intently watching my every move.

"How do you know?" Denzin probed.

"She does not DO change or crazy...and um," I kept trying to describe what I was thinking without revealing too much he could judge Janine and me on.

My new handler was not fooled. "You mean your wife doesn't do....Faith? Trust in God? What you are talking about is being a failure as a spiritual leader, John."

"Yes, ok!" I snapped back, louder than I should have, but I didn't care. I stuffed a finger into Denzin's face and let him have it. "We don't do this crazy 'faith' stuff anymore. We have kids, a mortgage, a life, and friends. Plus, I have friends and members in my congregation that have more than enough money to do this faith stuff! OK?"

The being smirked at me, "First off, it's not *'your'* congregation, and it never was, John. That's one of your biggest mistakes we will deal with later. Second, we didn't ask your members for money. We asked you." He finished by waving his hand, reminding me to take a step forward.

"What about Jim? Jim is worth millions, has several vacation houses, like ten cars, and makes a boatload every year."

"And is ten times the giver and has ten times the faith you have," Denzin cut me off. "Have you ever wondered why Jim has so much?"

"He's in computers."

"No, genius. It's because he is a servant. The guy has helped far more people than he's been paid for. In high school, he got into computers to help his grandma and her friends communicate with their families better, so they wouldn't be so lonely. Then he quit college to develop a new secure tablet specifically for foster kids to stay connected to their families and be monitored by social workers and mentors for safety. The Federal Government purchased that system for a ton, but Jim didn't even keep the money. He reinvested into another system for educating orphans and street children in Asia. Do I need to go on?"

I frowned and let my nose drift up a bit, defensively, "I didn't know all that," I thought for a moment, and took another step in line, thinking up my new excuse, "Well, then riddle me this, smart guy, if Jim is already primed for giving, why not just take it from him, since he has so much more? Why do I have to use all my savings?"

"You still don't get it, do you?" Denzin shook his head, then faced me and leaned in so close to my face that he almost touched my nose. "It's not YOUR savings, and it was never earmarked for you to keep. And also, because: YOU DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY!"

I scoffed back at him, "Of course I do; that's why I'm about to get on a plane...."

"No, you don't." Denzin leaned back on his heels and stared at me for a moment before continuing, "Everything you spend was given to you by faith, for God's work! Do you think that the electronic car you upgraded to came from money you made? Do you think that the 5-star spa vacation your wife went on with the 'rich' ladies from the neighborhood was paid for by you? Do you think you foot the bill for that upscale private school your kids go to - not to mention the house? No, you are using *His* Money, given to you, to spread HIS message to the community around you."

"Oh, come on, my house is not that big."

Denzin shook his head, "Yes, it is; even your sense of proportion is off! Also, it's in the third most expensive neighborhood in the state!"

"Safety is a concern." I shrugged my shoulders.

"You are supposed to be a pastor, a spiritual leader in trusting God. You should never be afraid for your physical safety as much as your spiritual relevance. You didn't ask if you could live in the nicest, safest, cookie-cutter neighborhood around; you just assumed you should! What if God wanted you in the worst area? Or, in the middle somewhere? Which is, BY THE WAY, where "your" congregation actually lives! Maybe, it would have been nice to live near them."

I rolled my eyes, "I'm SOOO sorry; next time, I'll find the nearest crack house and settle my wife and kids right next door. Would that make you happy?"

"That's not the point, and you know it," Denzin snapped back.

"Then what is?"

"*You never asked!*"

I swallowed hard, slapped in the face by this brick of truth. Denzin continued, "Maybe you do live in the right spot, or maybe not. Maybe, you should have been somewhere else, helping a single mom who just so happened to be your neighbor. But now, you'll never know."

I crossed my arms and turned my back slightly, like a child refusing to hear the word 'no.' "So sorry that I'm not perfect."

My handler's voice softened as his hand rested on my shoulder, "We are not asking for perfection." I turned my head and looked at him. He smiled back at me warmly, "Only obedience."

A finger tapped me on the shoulder. I looked back; it was the young couple behind me asking me to move forward, "Oh, sorry, yeah." I replied. I stepped up to a little girl facing me, clutching a stuffed unicorn.

"Are you crazy?" The little one asked.

The girl's mom was busy on the phone and juggling several carry-on cases. The mother was too busy to notice her daughter interrogating the man behind her.

I smiled down at her, "Yeah...you saw me talking to myself, huh?"

She shook her head, "No, silly." She giggled, "Your crazy 'cause you keep arguing with Him." She pointed up at Denzin.

My mouth dropped, "Wait. You can see this guy, too?"

The little one rolled her eyes, "Of course, I can, silly."

Denzin smiled at the girl, "Hi Lucy, how are you doing?"

"I'm ok, but I have not seen Gabe since my daddy went away. Where is he?"

Denzin bent down to one knee, getting down to eye level with the grade-schooler, "Mr. Gabe is very busy helping other strong, amazing girls, just like he helped you. But don't worry; if you need his help again, God will send me or someone else like Gabe to help you and your mommy; just ask, ok?"

Lucy shrugged her shoulders, the unicorn in her hand bouncing as she did, "It's ok, I just miss our tea parties, but I still have my tea parties with his Teacher, just like Mr. Gabe taught me to do, so that's ok."

"Honey, leave the poor man alone." The mom, still on the phone, had noticed her daughter's conversation and put a maternal hand on her back, ushering Lucy back in front of her.

Denzin leaned in and whispered, "Lucy's father was no good; my colleague, Gabe, had to make some moves to keep her and her mom safe."

"And he just showed himself to her?" I asked.

Denzin chuckled, "Oh no, she was born like that; she can see every person and spirit around." He leaned in and whispered, secretively, "Word around the water cooler is that she spoke to Gabriel first, before he knew her gifting. Apparently, he nearly jumped out of his skin!" Denzin slapped his knee and bellowed massive laughter, "Funniest thing we'd heard upstairs this century."

The mom and daughter were about to turn left, ushered that way by a female TSA agent; the agent motioned me to the right. Just as they turned to leave, the little girl spun around and stepped forward, "Hey, Mister."

I smiled down at her warmly, "Yes?"

"Don't fight with God; either He wins or you get real lonely."

She turned and chased after her mother.

Shocked, my mouth opened slightly; I looked over at Denzin. He was grinning from ear to ear as he motioned me down the roped-off security check line towards the x-ray machine. As I moved in that direction he quipped, "So John, are you ready to be scanned?"

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