



The Modern-Day Saul

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Miles, like many other angry young adults, joined the protests erupting across America in 2020. The first protest he ever attended was in his hometown and Miles marched with hundreds of others to fight against injustice. He carried a sign he hastily made that morning with one of the popular slogans floating around online, chanting it as he walked. After the protest Miles returned to his parents' home sure his actions, along with the others, would bring change to the city. Maybe even the country. When it didn't his anger deepened, causing Miles to seek other avenues to not only express his rage but enact actual change.

Like many other angry young adults Miles turned to the Internet for support. He soon found like-minded people in his city thanks to social media platforms. After immersing himself in various posts and threads, he met some of the like-minded people in-person at meetings held in the back of independent bookstores or rough bars. At these meetings Miles felt part of a group for the first time in years. These like-minded people sought change and wasn't interested in the things the "normies" or the "sheep" were interested in, like consumerism or capitalism. No, these like-minded people were interested in equality for all and social justice.

Miles learned at these meetings the best way to enact change was through violence.

While this tactic worried him because he never thought himself a violent person, Miles saw no other way to change society for the better.

Additional meetings taught Miles self-defense and how to arm himself for combat. He also learned how to protect his body using armor and certain clothing. He went to the store and bought goggles and a respirator to guard his eyes and sinuses against mace and/or pepper spray attacks. From one of the like-minded people Miles purchases a blackjack and a telescoping baton. He felt better wielding these weapons than a gun. The former only hurt people while the latter usually killed people.

Other meetings taught Miles how to disguise his face and his movements so he couldn't get caught by Law Enforcement or anyone in general. He was to use code words and code names when referring to the other like-minded people, and never carry ID on his person at a protest.

As Miles became indoctrinated into the group's values his anger transmuted into hate. He was ready to hurt anyone who got in his way, and he got the chance to do so when another protest erupted in a nearby major city. Miles traveled with the group of like-minded people to a safe house in the major city, changed into their battle gear, went over their plan of action, and then traveled to the protest. They went about vandalizing buildings and setting things on fire. When they came across anyone who tried to stop them the group attacked those individuals with their weapons.

During this mayhem Miles came upon a street preacher using a bullhorn to plead with the mob to stop the destruction and turn to God for assistance instead. The preacher was of average height and build. He wore a t-shirt slick from sweat and shorts and sneakers. His hair was cropped close to his head and the preacher's face was clean-shaven.

Miles stopped walking and stared at the street preacher. Instantly, his hatred rose up and he grabbed his blackjack from his pocket. He sprinted toward the preacher and struck the man in the head. The preacher dropped to the ground, the bullhorn tumbling away, and Miles screamed with glee from his victory. However, his feeling was fleeting as he realized the consequences of his action. Miles ran away, catching up with his group, seeking safety in numbers. The group knew what he did and congratulated him.

This pleased Miles, causing him to feel invincible. Plus, who would be able to identify who hit the street preacher? There were many protesters dressed like Miles. And that's exactly what happened: No one could tell the cops who attacked the preacher. That night he went to the hospital for care while Miles and his like-minded friends returned to the safe house to change out of their battle gear and travel back home.

Miles tried to put the attack behind him but his like-minded friends brought it up for the next few days. Eventually, the talk stopped and Miles was finally able to bury his shameful action in the back of his mind.

Soon, there was another protest in another city. The like-minded group traveled there to enact the change they believed in so dearly. After preparing in another safe house the group made their way to the protest and went about destroying property and attacking anyone who got in their way. While coming to an intersection the group found a man holding a sign stating the problems in the world came from mankind disobeying God's word. The man said nothing as he stood on the street-corner holding the sign. Two additional men stood nearby the sign-holder, giving out Bibles to people passing by. Some took the Bibles and threw them on the ground. Others tore the pages out, throwing them back at the men. The vast majority of people ignored the trio, however.

Upon seeing the group the hatred in Miles rose up fiercely and he removed a can of pepper spray and his blackjack from his pockets. He sprinted over to the men, sprayed them, then attacked them with the blackjack before running away. No one chased him due to the pepper spray's effects. It also helped he blended in too well with the other protesters dressed like him.

Time passed and Miles attended a few more protests with his like-minded friends. Each time he successfully found and attacked a street preacher or someone displaying passages from the Bible. Each time Miles wasn't chased or caught. At one of the meetings back in their city one of the like-minded group members asked Miles:

"Why do you always go after the preachers?"

He responded:

"Because the Bible-Thumpers do nothing to actually change the world for the better. They lie to everyone, telling them God's gonna fix everything if we just believe and follow his rules. There is no God. And there ain't no Heaven. If we want the world to change for the better we gotta do the work ourselves."

The group called Miles "No God" afterwards and he grew to enjoy the nickname. It not only succinctly explained his worldview, but endeared him with the group as all of them were atheists too.

Later another protest erupted in another city after a police officer took action against a citizen, causing that citizen to stay in the hospital for several days to heal from their injuries. The like-minded group traveled to attend the protest. After dressing for the event and hiding their weapons they went to the protest. During their rampage, Miles found a street preacher using the Bible to try to convince the protesters to stop the violence. The familiar hatred rose within him and he prepared for the attack. As he ran toward his potential victim a man saw the charge and pushed Miles away. Miles lost his footing and fell onto the pavement, his head cracking against the asphalt road.

Miles' like-minded friends came to his aid, picking him up while others fought the Good Samaritan. The friends carried him to safety as Miles couldn't walk properly. Back in the safe house the friends laid him onto a couch and removed his gear.

"I'm hurt bad," Miles moaned.

"What hurts, man?"

"My head's killin' me and I can't see."

"Shit, man. Where's that medic?"

"He's out helping some others. He'll be back soon."

"I'm hurtin' bad. I need to go to the hospital."

"We're not takin' ya to a hospital! They'll ask questions, and questions bring the cops."

"But I can't see!"

"No God, just calm down. You took a nasty hit in the head. Just try to relax. Your sight will come back soon."

"What about my pain? I'm hurtin' bad."

"Whoever got one of those pain pills give No God one."

One member of the like-minded group kneels down to Miles laying on the couch and gives him a pill from an unmarked pill bottle. He swallows it without hesitation with a gulp of water from a canteen.

"Listen up, everyone: We're gonna leave tonight. Take off your gear and pack up. And someone help No God into his other clothes."

Later, Miles rides in the back of a van, high and numb, leaning his head against the car window. His brown eyes move around seeking sight but find darkness instead.

Miles, why are you attacking my followers?

"Who said that?"

"Said what, No God?"

"Someone said somethin' to me."

"Man, no one is talking to ya. Your rattled head is messin' with ya."

Miles turns away from the voice and sits tense in his seat, his breathing quicker than before.

Miles, you travel around with those people to hurt and destroy. Why do you do this?

He grabs his head with his hands, cradling his face.

"I'm hearing voices now. I hit my head good," he mutters to himself.

You did hit your head but this voice is not a figment of your imagination. I am He.

"Who?"

God.

"There is no God."

I know you truly believe that, Miles. I will change your mind by showing you the truth.

The next morning Miles wakes up in his bed in his room in the apartment he shares with some of the guys from his like-minded group. He blinks several times but his sight is still absent.

He stands shakily to his feet, using his hands to balance his stance. Miles takes a step forward after much hesitation, trying to remember the layout of his room. He takes another unsure step, stumbles over something, and falls down.

"What the hell was that," asks a loud voice from outside Miles' room. "No God, was that you? What happened?"

"I fell down."

"Aw, shit."

A young man enters Miles' room and gather the blind man to his feet.

"You still can't see?"

"Nope."

"A nurse is comin' by later. She's gonna help ya out. She knows about your injury."

"I hope so. I want my sight back."

"Don't worry, man. Don't worry. She's gonna fix ya up."

"Can you take me to the bathroom?"

"Yeah, man. You can pee by yourself, right?"

"I can handle that. I just need someone to lead me."

The young man leads Miles to the bathroom, waits outside, and then leads him back to his room.

"Are you hungry, No God? Thirsty?"

"Nah. I don't feel like eating or drinking. I'm just gonna lay here on my bed and relax."

"Are ya still in pain?"

"Uh, I'm not. I feel tired, though. I'm gonna rest."

"Sure, man. Just call out if you need somethin'."

A few hours later Miles hears the doorbell and someone answers the door. A woman's voice speaks.

"Hey, Linda, he's back here. Hey, No God!"

"What?"

"The nurse is here."

The pair enters Miles' room and the blind man sits up on his bed, swinging his legs to hang off the side.

"You call him what?"

"No God. That's his nickname. He doesn't believe in God and doesn't like the Bible-Thumpers."

"What's your actual name," the nurse asks Miles.

"Miles."

"Nice to meet you, Miles. I'm Linda. I'm a RN and I'm here to help ya. I heard about your injury from the protest yesterday. Are you in pain right now?"

"No."

"You still can't see?"

"Yep. It's all dark."

"What do you think happened to him," the young man asks.

"Well, head injuries can cause temporary blindness. He could also have a concussion. Did you guys watch him yesterday?"

"We didn't. He seemed fine so we let him sleep it off."

Linda shakes her head and sighs. "You always watch a person who suffers a head injury. Just in case they fall unconscious. You're lucky the head injury wasn't worse. He could've died in his sleep."

"We'll know to do that next time," the young man says.

"What can you do to help me now," Miles asks.

"I'll take your vitals, check your senses, and do some other tests. I won't be able to bring your sight back. However, I think it will come back in a few days. If it doesn't then you gotta see a doctor."

Miles nods as his countenance drops.

Later, after his examination, he lays in his bed looking up at the ceiling even though he sees just the darkness. Suddenly, Miles blurts out: "You haven't showed me anything yet."

In two more days I will.

Miles sits up in bed, his face and mouth contorted from shock.

"You will," he whispers. "You will?"

Seconds later a man relaxing on his sofa in a different city enjoying a cup of tea in the relative silence hears: *Malcolm, it is time for you to go and help a man in need.*

The man doesn't move. He blinks slowly as he looks at his beverage.

"Who, Lord?"

I will show you.

Malcolm receives a vision of Miles sitting up in his bed, looking around the room rapidly.

"Who is that, Lord?"

The man who attacked you. The man who attacked my other followers.

"Well, well."

Go to the man's home in two days so I can reveal the truth to him.

The next morning Miles wakes up, blinking his eyes several times. His sight is still dark, causing him to sigh.

"I have one more day."

He calls out to his roommates and one comes to his aid.

"What's up, No God?"

"Can you take me to the bathroom again?"

"Sure."

His roommate leads Miles to and from the bathroom.

"Do you want any food or somethin'?"

"Nah. I just want to lay in my bed."

Miles sits on the side of his bed and leans forward, pointing his head toward the floor, rubbing his head and hair back and forth with both of his hands.

"One more day and I'll know the truth. But why do I care so much about that? I don't believe in God. Never really did. Wasn't taught to by my parents. Really...I didn't think about God. So why did I get so upset at those preachers? Something pushed me to hurt them. Maybe it was my anger? Or maybe I felt I had to show off to my friends? Could have it been the state of the world? Whatever the reason I know now that my actions lead me to here: Blind and scared. Scared I won't be able to see again."

The next day Malcolm arrives at the apartment building he saw in his vision, and looks at the directory to find the apartment number he needs to contact. Once he finds it he presses the button and waits for an answer. Several seconds later a gruff voice answers.

"My name is Malcolm. I am here to help Miles. I was sent here, actually."

"All right. I'll let you in."

The main door unlocks and Malcolm enters inside. He climbs the stairs to the specific floor and finds the correct apartment. He knocks twice, waiting patiently for it to open. It opens a few seconds later, revealing a young man wearing a concerned face.

"Come on in. I'll take you to him."

Malcolm follows the young man through the apartment to a particular room. He sees another young man laying on the bed.

"Hey, No God. There's a guy here to help you."

"Who?"

"My name is Malcolm. God sent me here to bring you out of the darkness."

Miles scrambles out of his bed and onto his feet.

"He is real!"

"God is real, and so is His power. Look at me, Miles."

He moves his head toward the voice, blinks once, and the darkness dissipates. With his eyesight restored Miles smiles broadly. The smile drops when he sees Malcolm.

"You're him."

"Who," the roommate asks.

"He's the street preacher I attacked. The first one. I, I hit him with my blackjack."

"What?!"

"Yes," Malcolm confirms. "I got concussion from that attack and a large medical bill. But God took care of me. Just as He is going to take care of you."

"Are you gonna turn me into the cops?"

"No. What good would that do? It would only cast you further down into your hatred. You'll end up as angry as your friends."

"You don't understand what we went through," the roommate says.

"I do. I was once like you: Incredibly angry and seeking change. Thankfully, I listened to God's word and escaped the destruction I was headed for. You two are headed toward a similar destruction."

"So what? If we die, we die. As long as we change the world that's all that matters."

"Are you ready to die for the cause, Miles?"

Miles swallows hard and adverts his eyes.

"Hey! Answer him! What are you waitin' for?!"

"I don't want to die," he finally confesses. "I, I wanted to belong. I wanted to feel like my actions mattered in the world. I never thought I mattered before I joined you guys. Then I got caught up in the violence and I don't...I don't want to do that anymore."

"You little...you know what? I always thought you were a fake, a fraud. You never wanted to get your hands dirty with the big jobs, only wanting to attend the protests. Get your shit and get out!"

"What?"

"You gotta leave! Only those who stand for the cause can stay."

"Where will I go?"

"With me," Malcolm interjects. "Come on. Let's pack your stuff."

The pair packs Miles' belongings into a large backpack and a suitcase. They leave the apartment, then the building, and walk down the sidewalk.

"I'm sorry for hitting you, Malcolm."

"It's all right. I forgave you long ago."

"What happens now?"

"You'll stay with me until God directs your way."

The men walk in silence for a bit.

“Will you – I mean, can you teach me what you know, Malcolm? About God and stuff?”

“I can if you’re interested.”

“I am. I did a bunch of thinking while I couldn’t see and I want to change.”

“What’s your middle name, Miles?”

“Edward. Why?”

“A new start at life requires a new name. You’ll be known as Edward now.”