

Thou Shalt Not Cheat

by

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FADE IN.

White letters in sequence on a black screen. Sound of typewriter.

. . . then God said, "Let us make man in our image, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
(sounds satisfied)
Yes. That will do nicely.

Writing fades away.

CENTER SCREEN: More typing sounds. More letters.

Genesis 1: 26 (more or less)

INT. MODERN RESEARCH FACILITY - DAY

Moving through the corridors of a modern research facility. Double doors with a nameplate that reads:

"Professor Sven Gormenghast (PhD)
Agronomy Genetics"

The door swings silently open.

INT. MODERN AGRONOMY LABORATORY - DAY

Rows of seedling trays. Overhead UV lights. Many racks of scientific equipment. Some larger plants stand in pots against a wall. Analysis equipment, exhaust cupboards - general laboratory equipment.

SVEN GORMENGHAST, mid 50's, wears the ubiquitous white lab coat. He potters about, checking plants, adding liquids to flasks, checking Petri dishes, making notes.

He is alone. He stops, looks around the large room and then puts down the flask he is holding. He tilts his head to one side and squints, as if listening to a faint sound.

SVEN
Yes--- Alright--- No, I am on my own today.

Sven moves over to a desk and sits in one of two chairs. He opens a drawer, removes and opens a lunchbox. He carefully arranges the contents on the

desk. It contains a pack of sandwiches in greaseproof paper, a flask of coffee, an apple and a banana. He selects the sandwiches.

The air around the other chair shimmers. A bright light fills the entire room. Sven casually closes his eyes against it, as if this is familiar to him. When he looks again, the chair opposite is now occupied by a man who despite sitting, is clearly quite tall.

He is nondescript with no redeeming features. Not someone you would pick out in a crowd because he looks so-- normal. His hair is light brown, almost blond and well-groomed. But his eyes are a deep and penetrating blue.

He is wearing black Chino pants and a plain white, open-neck shirt. On the pocket is a monogram. His feet are thrust into tan slip-ons, sans socks. He looks around the room and then focuses on Sven.

SVEN

Ah. Hello, God. Very nice of you to drop in. It's been a while. I am glad you could make it. You look-- refreshed. Rested.

God's expression lights up. He affords Sven a radiant smile and places his hands together.

GOD

Sven! How are you, old friend? Yes. I have been a bit busy lately. Tsunamis, earthquakes-- you know how it is. I do apologize. I intended to visit sooner. What's it been now? About seven days?

SVEN

About that, yes. Sandwich?

Sven proffers the package to God, who examines the contents and then waves a dismissive hand.

GOD

No. Thank you, Sven. I have already satisfied my hunger.

Sven nods and lifts up one corner of his sandwich. Apparently satisfied, he takes a bite. God's expression changes to one of genuine interest as He looks around the laboratory.

His eyebrows rise when he notices the trays of seedlings and other plants. His lips purse, as if in approval. Then he returns his concentration to Sven.

GOD

My! I see you *have* been busy.
Working on anything new? Changing
the world?

God watches Sven as he eats his sandwich with verve
and obvious contentment.

GOD (CONT/D)

Still playing Me?

At this remark, Sven presses a finger to his lips
and then swallows. He nods, and then shakes his
head.

SVEN

Yes. I mean no! Not playing You.
But busy, yes. My old friend TMV
- the tobacco mosaic virus. I
have now deciphered the entire
genetic code. Hopefully, it will
not take me too long to develop
an efficient crop spray that will
eliminate TMV completely.

Sven's expression cannot hide his obvious pride at
this recent achievement. God watches Sven as he
speaks. His expression is undoubtedly one of
amazement. His eyes light up at this new
information.

GOD

Really? Well, that is impressive.
TMV, eh? Who would have thought?
After all these years. The
centuries have just flown by.

Sven nods as he opens the flask and pours a cup of
steaming coffee. He holds it up.

SVEN

Coffee?

God frowns, pulls a face and shakes his head.

GOD

No, thank you. I prefer tea these
days. I find it calming. It
relaxes me.

SVEN

Right. Um, I only have coffee.

Sven looks around the room and then indicates a
distant refrigerator. It is pristine white.

SVEN (CON/D)

I have some orange juice.
(pause)
Very nutritious, you know.

GOD
No, thank you. I'm really not
that thirsty right now.

Sven sips his coffee. He watches God over the rim of the cup. Despite the enormity of the presence, Sven appears composed and relaxed.

God examines the room some more, taking in the equipment and rows of experiments. Then he slowly turns his head and fixes his eyes on Sven.

He pauses, and then tilts his head to one side. A smile crosses his face as his eyes narrow slightly.

GOD
(sighs)
Okay, Sven. What is it? What's on
your mind? Come on, spit it out.
I've known you long enough to
know when that brain of yours is
whirring away. I can almost smell
the smoke from here!

Sven does not return the smile. Instead, he looks at his feet, reticent to reply.

GOD
Go ahead. It's alright. Tell me.
Trust me, I am all agog.

Sven suddenly looks a little uncomfortable.

SVEN
Well-- I've been thinking--

GOD
Yes, you're good at that,
Professor Gormenghast.

God enunciates the word 'Professor'.

SVEN
No, about--well, You, actually.

God's expression changes to one of mild surprise.

GOD
Me? What about me?

SVEN
Um-- I've been thinking. Don't
you feel a little—

Sven looks really uncomfortable now. The corners of his mouth droop. He is searching for the right words, not wishing to offend.

SVEN (CONT/D)

— a little-- redundant?

God's eyes suddenly light up. They are cerulean and alert. He takes a moment to consider Sven's suggestion.

GOD

Redundant? Me? Why should I feel redundant? Is there something I should know?

Sven quickly shakes his head. He realizes he has used the wrong words. He takes a moment to reconsider.

SVEN

No. Nothing like that. What I mean is, well, I know you created all this—

Sven sweeps his arm across the room to encompass all they can see.

SVEN (CONT/D)

— and everything else--

God nods slowly in acknowledgement, still alert with anticipation.

GOD

Ye-es?

SVEN

But-- well, we've come a long way in the last, oh-- forty years or so? We've developed to the stage where we can almost make everything that You did initially. I mean, consider my own field of genetics. We can now replicate almost any living creature. We have mapped the human genome, conquered ninety-nine percent of all known diseases, can create life in a Petri dish--

(pause)

I'm sure that in just a few years we will be able to replicate-- anything. Create life from its basics. A bit like You did. I realize that You know this, so-- I was wondering-- Does all of this not make You feel a little-- redundant?

God's listens carefully as Sven speaks. His expression is one of unabashed amazement and surprise. It is clear that He is impressed.

GOD

Yes, Sven. It is true. You have progressed beyond my wildest expectations since you first slithered from the oceans. I have watched as you grew from monkeys to-- smart monkeys.

God pauses, then looks quizzically at Sven.

GOD (CONT/D)

Are you saying you have progressed to such a stage that you have become my-- equal?

Sven is visibly shocked by the suggestion. He splutters over his coffee and wipes his mouth with the sleeve of his coat. He looks a little flushed.

SVEN

Oh, no! NO! Nothing like that. Really. What I mean is—

God tilts back his head and emits a raucous laugh that echoes around the room. He peers at Sven.

GOD

Do you mean you no longer require Me for your-- miracles? You can now create them on your own?

Sven is crestfallen; surprised by the sarcasm.

SVEN

It's arrogant, I know. But-- well, yes. Sort of. I know there are still millions of people who believe in you. Not the way I do because-- well, because I *know* you exist.

Sven holds out his open palms towards God.

SVEN (CON/D)

After all, you are sitting right here, right now. Right beside me. Others just have blind faith that you exist. They-- Hope.

(pause)

Whereas I categorically *know* that you exist. It's-- it's *different*.

God considers this and presses a finger to his pursed lips. His expression reveals nothing of his feelings or thoughts.

GOD

Yes, I see what you mean. I had not thought of it like that. I apologize, Sven. My mistake. One among many I dare say.

SVEN

I'm sorry, God. I did not mean to—

God frowns and waves a dismissive hand. His features soften once again.

GOD

No, no! Please. It's quite alright, Sven. After all, it was I who furnished the brain with which you think. It would appear you have put it to good use.

(he points at Sven)

Specifically you. Perhaps too good, my friend. Eh?

Sven flushes. He appears embarrassed. He is startled when God suddenly claps his hands together and leans forward in his chair.

GOD

Tell you what. How about a little-- competition? Just between the two of us.

Sven frowns. His hand, halfway to his mouth with the remainder of a sandwich, halts in midair.

SVEN

A competition? Us?

God beams. He is visibly excited at the prospect.

GOD

Sure! Why not? If you are so convinced that you can do what I did with all your knowledge, your genetics and—

(he waves his hands to indicate the laboratory)

— all this-- stuff. A simple competition. To sort the Wheat from the Chaff, as it were.

Sven looks hunted. Yet even now, before his Maker, he exhibits a degree of belligerence.

SVEN

Um-- well, alright. What exactly did you have in mind for this-- competition?

God shuffles in his chair, making Himself more comfortable. His expression is bright, alert and enthusiastic. His light hair appears to glow in the morning light. He rubs his hands together rapidly.

GOD

Let me see---

God's eyes scan the laboratory, taking in its contents. His gaze finally falls upon a small white tray. He walks over to the tray. It contains rich, dark soil.

He picks up a handful, allows it to flow between his fingers. A very faint smile plays across his lips. Sven does not notice.

GOD

How about this?

SVEN

Soil? It's just soil. Sterile. I am going to use it—

GOD

Yes. I know. It's-- just soil.

Sven walks over and joins God beside the tray. God's eyes shimmer as he looks at Sven.

GOD

Watch.

God takes a handful of the soil and opens his hand. He places his other hand on top and closes his eyes. He gently rubs his palms together. Colored smoke oozes from between his fingers.

Yellow. Green. Purple - all the colors of the rainbow. The vapor coruscates, swirls and begins to take form. Before their very eyes, a beautiful Bird of Paradise pops into existence and flies around the room.

It finally finds an open window and exits the room. God rubs his hands down his robe to clean off the clinging dirt.

Sven's eyes are like saucers, his mouth hangs open. Despite his amazement, a smirk manages to cross his features.

SVEN

Impressive! Very impressive!
 However, the soil contains all
 the constituents of that bird.
 Carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen,
 oxygen, silicon--- Trace elements
 and minerals. Even gold and iron.
 I am sure I could create one.
 Perhaps not as fast or as--
fanciful as You did, but in time,
 yes. I believe I could do it. We
 have the technology.

God's smile is radiant. He fixes Sven in his gaze,
 his eyes more blue than ever.

GOD

Ah, Sven. Always the eternal
 optimist. You never disappoint
 me. Please, do go ahead. And, as
 I do possess somewhat of an
 advantage, I shall not put a time
 limit on this little contest.
 If you say you can do it, I
 believe you. In you. You seem
 quite sure of yourself, as
 always.

Sven is humbled, but still manages a wicked grin.

SVEN

Okay. I'll start now.

Sven reaches across and picks up a handful of the
 dark soil. His eyes burn with determination.

God's arm shoots out like greased lightning and
 clamps around Sven's wrist. Sven gasps. With his
 other hand, God wiggles a finger of admonishment
 under Sven's nose. His eyes narrow as he peers into
 Sven's face.

GOD

Uh-uh . . . make your own soil.

FADE OUT.

THE END