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GOD GUN!: A Half-Written Play, Devising an Original Theatrical Work Via Improvisation

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GOD GUN!: A Half-Written Play,
Devising an Original Theatrical Work Via Improvisation

by
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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Department of Theatre

Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program

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Louisiana State University
& Agricultural Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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Introduction

During my high school years, I was the founder and lead editor of our school creative writing guild and literary magazine. During one of our initial meetings, Mrs. Carrieanne Ledet, our faculty sponsor and my favorite teacher at the time, gave myself and our members a challenge: “Write a short story about whatever you think the afterlife is like. 500 Words.”

Now, this was a Catholic high school, so we got a lot of very dogmatic, extremely lovely, fluffy, and apostolic responses. *And there is nothing wrong with that.* It was an exercise of perspective, after all. But when I turned in a short story entitled, “Only Murderers Have Visiting Hours in Heaven,” it garnered a lot of attention, positive and negative, from my fellow writing staff.

The story – eventually becoming scraps of a play entitled *Dante: Dead* – surrounds a journalist named Scott Butler who, in the wake of the dissolution of his relationship with his near-fiancee Jean, is asked to kill himself in order to write an expose on the afterlife. The original work had Jean, his overbearing mother Margaret, his ex-seminarian best friend Harry Harrison, his incompetent boss Dan Daniels (I was a massive supporter of The Stan Lee Approach to Naming Your Characters at the time), and Dante, as in *The Divine Comedy*, as supporting characters. A narrative that took place predominantly in heaven, my story featured Scott touring the afterlife to discover a system that doles out justice based on humans’ manner of death: people who died in their sleep would spend eternity working as baristas, victims of drowning would become sailors, and those who were murdered would spend eternity in couples’ counseling with whomever murdered them. As a victim of suicide, Scott would have to mentor newly created souls preparing for their journey to earth. It was a concept that was at once blasphemous and compelling, and my teenage brain was more than pleased to have upset the right people. “Only

Murderers” caused outrage for about four hours on a weekday afternoon before it was shelved and entirely forgotten for about five years.

Then, mid-pandemic in the spring of 2021, having set aside my love of writing for more performative pursuits, I registered for a class in playwriting taught by the legendary Dr. Femi Euba. The final project was to write a one-act play, and per my procrastinatory habits, it was the morning of the due date and I had not written a word. Desperate for inspiration, I tore through my old creative writing folder and rediscovered a beloved heretical text. In order to keep it to a single setting, I reworked the narrative to take place entirely in his office on the day Scott is contacted by the afterlife. An apocalypse premise became the swinging sword to keep the plot moving, Harry Harrison was renamed to Harry Partridge, Dan Daniels became Michael Angelo (an absurd name to match the emerging absurdist tone of the work), Margaret became mere dark matter, the antagonistic Marty Lincoln was written in as a generator of chaos, and Scott, not his best friend, was to be the ex-seminarian. I locked myself in an empty classroom and produced a fifty-paged one-act in about four hours.

The work received positive feedback, and the process of writing and editing it reawakened something in me. I soon became obsessed about finishing it. The final moment of the first act was Scott’s firing of the gun, *presumably* to get to heaven in order to interview God, but there were so many unanswered questions: What was heaven like? *Was* there a heaven? What does God want with him? What *really* happened at seminary? Would Scott and Jean ever get back together? *Was the world really going to end?*

It wasn’t until one normal Thursday meeting of the LSU Improv Club that it occurred to me how I might go about answering them. What if a team was to improvise an entire second act to the script of an unfinished play?

And so *GOD GUN!* was born. The goal became this: to improvise a satisfying, creative, and unique ending to the play every night of its run, thus devising and building what would be the final iteration of the script as a team.

Having been a member of the Improv Club for many years and intimately familiar with the rigorous, five-day a week rehearsal schedule, I formed a team of five performers to join me on this project. The attributes required for this experiment were so unique that no audition was necessary. The cast became as follows: Nic Russo as Scott, Chase Bernard as Harry, Arden Forrand as Jean, Adam Gothreaux as Marty, and Adam Register as Michael.

It would be a similar situation with my creative team; in most cases, filling each position was only a matter of asking, given my familiarity with most of the designers and their impressive resumes. My stage manager and assistant director would be recent graduates Brandon Persica and Jackson Munsell. Recent graduate Emma Massengale would be lighting designer, with current student Kate Landry as her lighting assistant, Andy Lancaster as sound designer, Alyssa Paccacio as costume designer, and M.F.A. Crystal Hayner as dual props master and set designer. Logan Naddy, another recent graduate and previous president of the Improv Club, would join us periodically to coach the cast through Act II. Thus, *GOD GUN!* would be a total collaboration between current students, alumni, and grad students.

With the financial support of the Ogden Honors College and the resources of the School of Theatre, we embarked on a highly ambitious thesis project of theatrical proportions. *GOD GUN!* truly put our skills and knowledge of our craft to the test, and the fruits of our labors produced a play unlike any the world's ever seen.

The overall process for the devising of the completed *GOD GUN!* can be broken up into four stages: initial ideas and form background, rehearsals, performances, and the curation of the

second act. Each step presented distinctive challenges and subsequent revelations that offer a fascinating analysis of how stories are built, what they are made of, and how they grow.

Initial Ideas and Form Background

In the summer of 2019, I studied abroad at St. Hilda's College at Oxford University as part of the Ogden at Oxford program. One evening, we took a group trip into London to see an improv show called *Austentatious* in the West End. What I saw there would lay the foundation of what would be the premise of *GOD GUN!* Gathering a suggestion of the name of an “unwritten” Jane Austen novel from the audience, the *Austentatious* troupe would proceed to improvise an entire play based off of the style, characters, and body of work of Jane Austen. I had only done short form improv up until this point, and this was the very first time I had ever seen an entire play created before my eyes.

In the years that followed, a little show called *Middleditch & Schwartz* would hit Netflix. A three-part improv show taped live, Ben Schwartz and Thomas Middleditch would interview a single audience member about their lives and proceed to improvise a one-hour play based on the characters, events, and themes that were relayed. Unlike *Austentatious*, *Middleditch & Schwartz* was unrestrained by genre but limited by ensemble (being a two-person show). I was obsessed with it and found myself studying their methods, mannerisms, and storytelling techniques around the same time I was writing the first act of *GOD GUN!*

As our curriculum in Improv Club became longform focused (a series of scenes that have continuity and tell a larger story), it became a personal goal of mine to learn how to do what Middleditch, Schwartz, and the *Austentatious* troupe could do. During our club meetings, the obvious difficulties began to emerge: a performer in these forms had to be an actor, a director, *and* a playwright, all the while communicating and collaborating with the other members of the ensemble. With time and practice, myself and my fellow club members began to get the hang of it, but it was certainly the most challenging out of all of the forms we had studied.

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact moment this longform concept married the half-written script of *GOD GUN!*, but once the idea of completing the story via improvisation hit me, I couldn't stop discussing it and working it out every chance I got. Initially, I had thought that the project might entail a lot of studying of the form and the text and culminate in a single performance, without any technical elements at all. It was my friend Jackson Munsell who, talking it over with me one day over coffee, asked, "Why one show? Why not multiple endings?"

This was a thrilling concept. This would give the production a full run, as well as supply myself as the playwright tons more fodder for devising. This snowballed and snowballed, and the project became more and more ambitious. Why not include improvised lighting? Sound? Costumes? What if we did *three* shows? *Six*? Would that even be possible? Could we truly deliver an audience a new show every night, and could I get what I needed as the editor/playwright/deviser from that effort?

Devised theatre, though having existed for thousands of years, has only come into the modern, public eye in the past twenty years or so. Devised theatre fundamentally utilizes repetitive improvisation based on an idea, theme, or sometimes general outline of a story, to build an original work based off of those discoveries. My experiment would be a variation of these techniques. Devising, for one, is typically not based on a text at all. *GOD GUN!* Act II would be based entirely off my characters and story with the goal of being a truthful continuation of that text. Also, my production would seek to create a unique, live experience for the audience every single night. We would not aim to perfect our Act II, with each passing show serving as a clearer, honed rendition of the previous night's. Rather, each evening's performance would forge a brand-new narrative path. The work of the actual "devising" would mostly fall to me, recreating and perfecting improvised moments again and again, textually, until they flowed.

Now, obviously, a keen improviser learns what works and what doesn't. My cast would, and did, discover types of jokes that worked, pairings and groupings that were engaging and good for storytelling, particular games and physical gags (we would end up doing a lot of *Weekend at Bernie's*-style scenes). And I did not intend to stifle that. However, the overarching stories and concepts would have the intention of individuality.

By spring, I had reached out to Dr. Fletcher of the School of Theatre, who graciously agreed to oversee and guide me on this project. It was a matter of days before a complete cast and crew was put together. As a team, mid-summer, we met with Jim Murphy of the School of Theatre about usage of the Studio Theatre blackbox space. While much of our approval was contingent upon the COVID-19 pandemic and regulations, it also meant that the space would be free, given that the normal season of LAB shows were put on hold. Thankfully, we were given permission, and after a follow-up meeting with John Eddy of the School of Theatre, we had secured our space for rehearsals and the run of the show.

Once I had a clear idea about the premise and parameters of the show, I met with a few members of my future cast and creative teams to discuss the prospect of the project. Together, we read and discussed Kenn Adams's *How to Improvise a Full-Length Play*, which was essential in training us on various techniques of how to prepare for the undertaking and execute it. Adams details several story and character-building exercises that we would later implement in our rehearsal process. He also dedicates a good deal of time to emphasizing the importance of consequences – how to build character-driven decisions with fallout that is allowed to fully impact the world of the play. Much of my directing technique would mirror his philosophy.

In my personal research regarding improvising a half-written play, I came up surprisingly short – with the exception of the Half-Written Play Festival. In 2015, the Hideout Theatre in

Austin, TX, held a play festival with a unique concept: they would team up with an acclaimed playwright, have them write exactly *half* of a play, and then each night, have their company improv troupe perform the rest. Steve Moore of the Physical Plant Theatre in Austin would be their playwright, while John Bolden, the visionary behind the festival, would direct and develop the shows. The Festival was such a hit among members of the community that they would bring it back again the following year, with Steve Moore returning. It was encouraging to read of their success as I commenced my production process.

I reached out to the Hideout Theatre and was able to connect with John Bolden. On October 17, 2021, after a long email exchange, I was able to conduct an interview with him over Zoom. Although we were unable to meet prior to the closing of my production, we had a fascinating conversation comparing and sharing knowledge of both of our processes. While similar conceptually, there would be many differences in both the execution and goals of *GOD GUN!* and the Half-Written Play Festival. For one, neither Bolden nor Moore were out to devise a completed work out of the improvised endings. Additionally, *GOD GUN!* would include a rehearsed first act and long-term familiarity with the work, while Bolden would have his actors read the play cold each night of the festival. They would then have to improvise the conclusion having only been acquainted with the text for about twenty minutes. Because of this, there would also always be a narrator onstage, reading stage direction, correcting names of characters, and generally assisting with the storytelling during the first, written act (during which, of course, the actors would have the script in hand). They also had their costuming and props table onstage to assist the actors and ensure everything they needed was in reach.

We held two table readings of Act I, one in April of 2021 and another on the first day of rehearsals. We encouraged everyone on the team to watch recordings of *Middleditch* and

Austentatious online and, during club time, had extensive discussions about our observations. Most of my creative team were tried and true theatre folk who, bored to death by the lockdown, were itching to try something new, exciting, and a little bit scary. By August, with our preparation and research complete, we were ready.

Rehearsal Process

Prior to the rehearsal process, I met with my stage manager and assistant director to put together the rehearsal schedule. Adhering to typical professional standards, we would rehearse August 30-September 26, taking Fridays and Saturdays off, and begin Tech on September 27, with the show running from October 6-9. We operated under a budget of \$500.00 thanks to the Tiger Athletic Foundation Scholarship.

Putting it together, we knew it was crucial that Act I be blocked and rehearsed as though it were a normal play, and so a good two weeks was dedicated to simply working on the first half before improvisational elements were introduced. It was emphasized to me by my superiors that an improvisational “vibe” be retained throughout both acts in order for the audience’s experience to not feel too jarring and retain the show’s cohesiveness. And so, prior to rehearsals, I went through my Act I script and underlined moments of optional dialogue improvisation for my actors – opportunities they almost always took, to the delight of cast, crew, and patrons.

A typical rehearsal at this stage would begin with a half-hour warmup, led by my assistant director Jackson Munsell, which included an opening meditation, group energy games, and character development exercises. The last of these would involve actors practicing moments of improvising in character, without the looming threat of plot. For instance, a premise for a scene might be: Harry gets a drink from the water cooler. Then, Chase, fully embodying Harry in physicality and behavior, would go get a drink. Bit by bit, as rehearsals progressed, we might add interactions with other characters (i.e. Marty joins Harry by the water cooler), and begin running short scenes. These exercises did a lot of good to connect the actors to their characters without a script and familiarize them with their speech patterns, reactions, and movements. The cast we had at our disposal was already so experienced at general improvisation and storytelling that the

only connection that truly had to be made was *improvising in character*. Given that these people are not caricatures for the most part and have in-depth background, history, and interpersonal feelings about every one of the other characters, it was important to explore and unravel them in increments. That way, when Act II rehearsals begin, and there's, say, an asteroid heading for earth, Arden, Nic, and Adam could skillfully improvise reacting as Jean, Scott, and Marty, as opposed to merely skillfully improvising.

Once warm-ups were complete, I would take over blocking and running scenes. I had never directed a full-length production before, and after a couple days of trial and error, I fell into the role nicely. I discovered my directing style bit by bit along the way – very hands-on and character-oriented, more small picture than big picture (a fact which surprised me). It was easier than I expected to separate the minds of Friend and Playwright from Director, and my actors were so professional that they made it quite easy, too.

By September 12, we had realized that we were way ahead of schedule and had already blocked and could run Act I comfortably. My creative team and I made the decision to dive headfirst into our Act II work on September 13. Our goals for Act II were quite dynamic: to avoid making the second act a parody of the first (with an emphasis on making the improvised scenes grounded within semi-realistic character choices and responses), to communicate and collaborate between actors and design and technical persons to present the evolving final act to the fullest degree, and to find a satisfying and *unique* conclusion to the story every night.

We began by reviewing a typical play structure and studying the typical beats of a theatrical work. In improv, we have several longform exercises that we are used to working with, each with their unique scene structure mandating the presence of certain characters, locations, and actions. We knew we would have to carefully curate an Act II scene structure via

trial-and-error – or, to put it more accurately, trial-by-fire. And so, on that September 13 evening, we took what we knew about the show and these characters and, excluding active technical elements, gave Act II a go.

And *wow*.

For a total of one hour, the cast improvised a finale to *GOD GUN!* that was practically show-ready. Without spoiling too much, it was much of what I had always envisioned for these characters, and given their skill and full understanding, it makes sense that the very first run would include much of the most obvious character and narrative choices. This run was not recorded, unfortunately, because we were ahead of schedule and without a videographer, but luckily I took plenty of detailed notes.

For the next week, we performed runs of Act II to varying degrees of success. The idea behind the week-long working of it was to build improvisational endurance, as typical shows are usually no longer than forty-five minutes, and to expound upon the character discoveries we would make every day. From here, the lore of *GOD GUN!* began to solidify. Dark matter characters were given explanations, and we often got to learn information about a character's family and childhood, as well as their spiritual and ideological beliefs. The answers to the 'big questions' posited in Act I remained variable. The world always ended differently, sometimes not at all, and explanations for Scott's past and mental health were allowed to evolve because of their momentous determination on outcome. Otherwise, we developed past events and history for other characters and the office itself that were able to refer back to in future runs of the show, which proved helpful. For example, the cast gradually made the discovery that the office building had an elevator and basement level. Character-wise, we learned that Marty went to Dartmouth on a sports scholarship, that Harry's mother died of a heart attack when he was very

young, that Jean and Harry had intended to get a dog before the breakup (i.e. the blue, rubber ball, now a symbol of dreams deferred), and most influentially, that Jean's father had in fact killed himself. Given that they were developed out of self-knowledge of their characters and based on truth and preexisting story elements, they remained as canon.

After a week, we took a break from straight runs and focused on our creativity. We discovered that it was getting harder and harder to be original and not just perform the Most Obvious Thing. To break out of these habits, I developed a game called "20 Ways to Have an Afterlife." During this game, the cast would rapid-fire begin scenes in the afterlife with a unique premise to each one; they might be in normal heaven, "Party Heaven," normal hell, "Baby Hell," a purgatorial void, a nirvana-like afterlife, etc. It was very successful in getting everyone's creative juices flowing. At this time, we also returned to Act I work and other story-oriented improvisational games. We had learned it was best to not overwork the Act II muscles and that our best full runs occurred after days of rest.

We also did a good deal of whiteboard work during this time, wherein we tried to map out a solidified scene structuring for our Act IIs. During our runs, we had discovered that time was often evenly split between Scott's time in the afterlife and the going-ons of the office, and we wanted that to reflect in our final structure. In the end, we worked out an "ABABAC" structure that would alternatively take place in the afterlife and the office, with about a ten minute runtime for each scene. The "C" scene would combine the events of both sequences and would take place wherever the cast chose. "ABAB" would mostly consist of rising action, and the final "AC" would be the climax/denouement (the latter taking place entirely in the "C").

A remaining challenge of the rehearsal process was developing our suggestion format for Act II. It was originally posited that the suggestion might be based on a spinning wheel or a roll

of the dice and would vary every night depending on the result. The optionable questions to the audience might be, “What’s a surprising way the world might end?” or “Who’s someone that would be cool to meet in the afterlife?” But after a few trials of this, we found that the routine mostly felt like a complicated gimmick, and because of its specificity, restricted the actors rather than opened doors for them. Crystal Hayner, our props master, had found us a large, antique bible as one of the available props for Act II. I had the idea one day that, given the show was thematically biblical satire, it might be interesting to have audience members flip through and select a bible verse from which we would base our second act. Given the varying, descriptive, and dramatic content and descriptors found in the Good Book, it ended up being a compelling suggestion-getting tool we retained for the entirety of the run. After gathering a verse, we would also ask another audience member which character they wanted to begin Act II. This would also dictate whether the “A” scenes would be afterlife or earth-based.

But who would gather the suggestion each night? My original intent was that one of the actors, in character and varying each night, would approach the audience immediately following intermission. Experimenting with this, we made a few important discoveries. Firstly, that waiting until after intermission was confusing for a blind audience, and that asking for the suggestion immediately following Act I better explained the show’s formatting, further connected the acts, and gave them something to look forward to. Secondly, individual characters asking for the suggestion was often uncomfortable and felt too out-of-world. Scott, having just killed himself at the end of Act I, was never a contender for the Suggestion Asker, but we also soon discovered that certain solitary characters were not effective for gathering information. Michael, for instance, a character incapable of asking a direct question, would be a terrible contender – but so would a mourning Harry, who just witnessed his best friend’s death. Coupling up our characters

proved to be the winning algorithm. Comedically, this proved effective, as they could play off of one another, and it maintained an ensemble-based storytelling format. The final revelation of the suggestion conundrum is retrospectively so obvious that it pains me to think it did not occur to us sooner: the Perfect Pair was always any given character...and *Marty*.

Marty, the only scripted character who directly speaks to and refers to the audience at numerous points in the first act, ended up being the prime representative of the cast of characters to approach the audience directly. From a storytelling standpoint, it makes perfect sense – he, after all, already has an established relationship with the patrons on any given night. But character-wise, it does as well. Marty is larger-than-life, crude, and disrespectful, but he’s a salesman at heart and presents himself and his ideas quite effectively. And so it would be: each night, prior to intermission, Marty and Jean, Harry, or Michael, would wander onstage, conversing as normal. Then, Marty would point out to his scene partner to not forget to get a suggestion from the audience. The other fourth-wall blind character, not understanding him at all, would either ignore him or be totally oblivious to his meaning. Marty would then enter the seating bank with the bible and begin asking for volunteers. (A fun and oft-repeated gag of ours would have the other character desperately searching for the vanished Marty onstage. The factual and nervous Harry was the best at this.) After an audience member had selected a verse, they would read it aloud, followed by Marty repeating it for the cast. Lastly, he would ask another audience member who they wanted to begin Act II before reentering the “metasphere” of the play.

The introduction of technical elements during the final week of *GOD GUN!* rehearsals was quite the undertaking. We were lucky to have many of our designers available to sit in on many runs and rehearsals of both acts, so by the time they were on duty, they were

well-familiarized with the piece and many potential improvisational outcomes. They entered tech week with their own personally curated lists of common locations, sounds, clothing, and ambient necessities. This way, everyone from costumes to lighting had a pre-set for major locations like heaven, hell, the hospital, or the office. The most difficult aspect of Tech was not lack of options but rather simply rehearsing moving along with the rapid pace of the actors. Props and costumes could move fairly quickly handing/throwing things backstage or in the wings, but it took some time for lighting and sound to have their presets easily accessible. To allow them to practice literally *improvising lighting, sound, props, and costuming*, we had the cast improvise prologue scenes to *GOD GUN!* for a few days, so as to not tap out the Act II mental reserves. By final dress, we were ready.

Before detailing the show's performances, I'd be remiss if I did not highlight the fact that *GOD GUN!* was conceived, rehearsed, and eventually, performed, all while in the midst of a pandemic. We were met with many challenges in this regard but, with a gracious cast and a brilliant design team, we were able to make the best of what we were given.

Luckily, at the time of our first rehearsal, social distancing guidelines had relaxed. However, the university was still under a mask mandate, and it was a concern that the actors would have to have much of their faces covered throughout the show. Luckily, our costume designer Alyssa Paccacio was able to utilize the costuming budget to find clear, plasticized face coverings that allowed for total coverage *and* visibility. We used these throughout rehearsals and the run of the show.

Additionally, we operated under a 65% audience capacity cap (maintaining no more than 65 people in the hundred-seater at all times) with a university-issued HEPA filter running throughout all rehearsals and shows. This was a bit of a sound issue that unfortunately could only

be managed via typical projection techniques, though our sound designer Andy Lancaster was able to set up a downstage microphone to pick up actors' dialogue for the show recordings.

Regardless, it was well worth it to do our part in keeping our fellow students and faculty safe.

Performances

GOD GUN! opened on October 6 in the Music and Dramatic Arts Building's blackbox Studio Theatre. We were honored to have a completely sold-out run! There were a total of five performances, taking off for Saturday and two on Sunday. Detailed below are the alternate endings developed by the cast:

I. "Huzzah!" – October 6, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51vgbSZZIBQ&t=2525s>

Scott wakes up in heaven where he meets an aged God and his nurse/angel, Andy. He informs Scott that he is set to retire and out to choose a new God. While Scott undergoes a series of tests, Jean is summoned to heaven via gun-package as a back-up should he fail. However, due to a clerical error, she winds up in hell instead. Scott sets out to rescue her and the two battle the forces of evil.

II. "Michael's Basement Spectacular" – October 7, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8GS-ks9AVc>

Word gets to corporate that a man killed himself in the offices of *The Columbus Post*. The owner of the newspaper arrives just in time for Scott's body to be stuffed away. Michael is fired, and in a skirmish with the Gun, is also accidentally killed. Scott, meanwhile, wakes up in the afterlife's airport and is accosted by two angelic TSA agents. He also encounters a recently deceased Michael, who helps him on his journey. Back on earth, a massive power outage sends the remaining employees down to the basement, where they uncover an adult amusement park their boss had been secretly constructing. Meanwhile, Michael and Scott arrive in heaven, where they meet God. God tells them that humans

have got to start treating each other better, and she had hoped that an article revealing the existence of the afterlife might do so. Michael is deployed to earth to convey the article, while Scott remains in heaven, working to help humanity from the other side.

III. “Butler v. God” – October 8, 2021

[VIDEO/AUDIO LOST DUE TO TECHNICAL ISSUES]

A media frenzy follows Scott’s apparent suicide and sudden ceasing of the apocalypse. The employees of *The Columbus Post* become the center of national attention and spark a nationwide debate as to the existence of heaven and general workplace morality. In the afterlife, Scott learns he has been summoned by the other angels, who hope that he can stop God from ending the world. Scott takes God to court, and the Trial for Humanity commences (with Hitler and Gandhi as witnesses, of course). Scott wins, and the self-obsessed God is forced to end the apocalypse. In the end, Scott returns home, reunites with Jean, and saves the world.

IV. “The Primordial Void” – October 10, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edlwoOLfTIU>

Scott awakes in a purgatorial waiting place between worlds, which he is informed by two wandering angels is referred to as “The Primordial Void.” He also encounters John, Jean’s father, who tells him that he is trapped here because he is not fully dead – in fact, he never made it out of the bathtub prior to the events of Act I. On earth, Scott is in a hospital, in a coma. His friends surround him and wonder what led to this, as they try to imagine life without him and his impact on their lives. The angels return and assist Scott in his reawakening, and he wakes in his hospital bed with a newfound appreciation of life.

V. *“A is for Apocalypse!”* – October 10, 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6WrtWUumAE&t=180s> [AUDIO ONLY]

Scott awakes in a pseudo-Sesame Street afterlife inhabited entirely by puppets. They allude that their leader is a mysterious figure called The Puppetmaster. Chaos ensues as Scott is roped into guest-starring on an episode of the “show” (“Rabbit’s Birthday”) until he learns the “Lesson of the Day.” On earth, Michael and the other employees are interrogated by the police. Scott has a meeting with The Puppetmaster, a sort-of-God figure who tells him the world can be saved if positivity is spread around the world. They all sing The Goodbye Song, and Scott is sent home.

For the most part, the show went out without a hitch. However, we did have a few technical glitches: first, our transitions between scenes lagged a bit due to actors changing into costumes and our run crew resetting the stage, and secondly, due to an accident that occurred to the recording equipment, the entirety of Friday and the video for our evening Sunday show were lost. But those things aside, it was a very successful run. Our Act IIs ranged from logical to completely illogical, sentimental to schticky, but always hilarious and creative.

After polling the cast and crew, “A is for Apocalypse” and “Huzzah!” are generally considered the favorites. My personal favorite ending was “Michael’s Basement Spectacular.” I would consider “Butler v. God” our weakest, solely because I feel the courtroom structure locked the cast in a bit and restricted the options of what was possible. But even that show had me belly-laughing throughout. Regardless of the night or any technical hiccups, the cast always delivered a thoroughly entertaining finale.

Building the Second Act

The process of compiling the complete draft of *GOD GUN!* ended up being much more difficult than I anticipated. What became “probably by November” became “definitely end of January” became a stressful week in March when I had what I can only refer to as Writer’s Madness. After the great reception the show received, a lot of people, the cast and crew most of all, were anticipating the promised “mega-act,” and it was a lot of pressure to both deliver a satisfying ending and not to disappoint.

In the end, I wrote three complete versions of *GOD GUN!* Act II before I was satisfied, and they are *wildly* different. The first one, which I was extremely partial to, followed the scene structure of our improvised shows very closely (“ABABAC”). This draft was a wish-fulfillment draft for me and was eerily similar to the original concept for *Dante: Dead*: Scott wakes up in heaven, begins interviewing various dead people while the people down below fret, he’s not allowed to see God until he has a total meltdown, and at last, God sits him down and has the promised, in-depth interview. The emphasis of this draft was acceptance of change (i.e. the breakup), and Scott returns to earth and makes amends with Jean and parts ways.

The second draft had its opening scene in heaven, but the rest of the stage action took place on earth. This version *begins* mid-interview with God, who informs Scott that the world *is* going to end and simply wants to send him back to inform and ease humanity. He is sent back to earth, and the rest of the act involves him convincing each person to accept the end of the world. The idea here was that, if improv is *yes, and*, then *GOD GUN!* needed to conclude with an *over-acceptance* of the apocalypse. There is a blackout, a big bang, and suddenly, Scott would reemerge, dripping wet as the world began again. The ending was purposefully vague, a slight insinuation that he was always still in his bathtub, but nicely bookended with the end of the

world and the beginning of a new one. While I was not enthused about much of this draft, it did pain me to cut that final, silent scene.

At long last, the final draft of *GOD GUN!* emerged during a week in early March. I kept getting stuck with the various heaven-set scenes, and every single interview with God I wrote felt increasingly disingenuous and over-dramatic. This was an issue we found during the show's run as well: it was always a full-stop every time we reached the interview with God; the momentum was gone, and whoever wound up playing God (typically Jean or Harry) found themselves stuck in a vague blockade of semi-mystical, overtly tongue-in-cheek Explanation-O-Thon as they trailed off, sort of explaining why they decided to end the world but not really. In fact, everything set in heaven...was always lower tier than the earth scenes (a comparison of an A grade to an A+). It lacked groundedness, and while entertaining, did not feel very *GOD GUN!* – an *office* comedy. I also knew, as an audience member and having interviewed my actors, that Scott having been in his bathtub and Act I being a dream was the most satisfying, truthful ending. I had secretly hoped for that, and it was the primary reason I had written in the incessant coughing and water effects.

For all these reasons and more, *GOD GUN!* became entirely earth-bound. Jean and Harry muse about life and death, Scott is a limp noodle of a corpse for about half of it while almost buried and cremated, Michael attempts to wrangle his subordinates into multiple hijinks, Scott returns, spins his yarn about heaven, has a confrontation with Jean, *realizes he's been dying and it's all a dream*, confronts his feelings of abandonment, and at long last, sits down with John (Jean's deceased father) as the final question is posed: To be or not to be?

I went back and forth as to whether or not to reveal it was all a dream. Initially, it seemed like such a cop-out, but on the other hand, it explained a lot of the absurdism and

one-dimensional presentations of various characters. In the end, the fallout of that realization became more important than the realization itself, and based on the feedback I've received, substantiated it.

The focus of this final draft surrounds themes of guilt and blame, concepts highlighted in Act I, and explored further in the second. The breakup, or the idea of “breaking up” and what that entails becomes the nucleus of Scott’s deluded heavenly and real earthly warbles and thus the climax involves discussions of codependency and acceptance of responsibility. The final moments of the show are spent with John, and not Jean or others as in previous drafts. This allows for Scott to essentially have a final confrontation with himself, in the form of the only person he’s ever known to have killed themselves. The breakup is the catalyst for his suicide attempt, but the true conflict lies within Scott – not within his relationship.

The recordings we took of the performances proved very useful in compiling the final draft, as did my own notes taken during rehearsal runs. I went through and highlighted specific lines and concepts that grabbed me. Much of the first half of the act was devised from actor-led concepts, but everything from Michael’s “What do we do with a dead body?” speech and on, with the exception of the John/Scott scene, is purely original.

I’m almost ashamed to admit just how much content I took from that *very first* run of Act II on September 13th (and the run the following day on the 14th). Arden had done such a character-accurate job in improvising Jean’s immediate reaction to Scott’s death that much of that action in the opening scene made it into the final draft, beat for beat. Her staring at the phone, playing with the ball, and most of the conversation with Harry all came from that first day. In terms of the Dog Monologue, in the original story, that dog died, but I reworked the ending to more accurately reflect Scott’s mental state. Additionally, the 14th was the first day we

ever implemented Jean playing her father, a moment that eventually became the bedrock of the final draft. Those were two rehearsal dates that we really discovered the heart of Jean as a character.

In many cases, specific lines improvised by actors during a rehearsal or show made it to the final draft (i.e. Scott's "I can't even kill myself right!", Michael's "I'd praise Jesus if he wasn't trying to kill us right now!"). In others, lines were kept but reassigned to other characters to prove relevant (i.e. Michael's, "I DON'T KNOW WHO YOUR BEST FRIEND IS!" became Marty's). Even some offstage cast jokes made it into the script – God being "impotent" (as opposed to omnipotent) and "Wrong Jean" (a riff of "Wrong Arden") – in a way that was wholly relevant without feeling too insidery.

Out of all the characters, Jean and Marty grew the most in the development process. In the first act, Jean can be very one-note and the straight-man, but Arden really discovered her layers. She could be funny, sensitive, angry, and a stickler of the rules, too. Marty, too, comes across as a caricature/exposition machine, but Adam Gothreaux really uncovered his fun dynamic with the anal-retentive Harry. The two of them worked so well together that much of the onstage action in Act II found its way into their interactions.

A particular difficult scene to write was Scott recounting his time in heaven. I saved it for last, and knowing it was all a figment of imagination within a figment of imagination, I knew it had to be an extremely calculated narrative – the innermost representation of Scott's fury and self-disgust. And so, Scott is "broken up with" both when he meets his spiritual overlord (God) just as he is with the person who used to be the bedrock of his earthly existence (Jean). It's semi-anticlimactic but purposefully so. Scott himself cannot disguise his disappointment with his

heroism and failure to initially connect with Jean's father, and the shades of him that are revealed in this encounter serve as the fodder for his penultimate argument with Jean.

The final moments of the show were also rewritten a few times. I was always planning on having the final decision come down between the gun and the ringing of the phone. (The phone, for the curious reader, serves as a sort of general "call to life" metaphor. Is it someone discovering him and calling the paramedics? Is it just a random phone ringing somewhere in the real world? Is it God? All of the above.) Originally, I had the final moment of the show as Scott diving for the phone, picking it up at the last minute, and saying slowly, "Hello?" However, I toyed with it and found that a blackout before the visual of his decision was more effective. It might sound strange, but I almost felt that if I tied everything up nice and neat I was not doing an effective job as a playwright. And so we are left with a question: What do you think he does? And even more pressing, gathering up all the available evidence, what *should* he do? Would you want to live or die?

It's a gritty and painful ending for a predominantly comedic show, but from this writer's perspective, I couldn't be more at peace with it. It was well worth the lengthy gestation.

Conclusion

At the start of this project, I set out to devise an original play from a series of improvised conclusions to a half-written script. As you can see in the pages that follow, I'm very proud to have been successful. In a matter of weeks, a collaborative team of artists studied a work that was deeply personal to me and believed in it so fully that it could be brought to life both with my words and without. *GOD GUN!* was truly the most meaningful artistic experience of my life, wherein this actor learned to play the roles of director *and* playwright.

If I had to go back and do it again, I would have only changed two aspects of the experiment. Firstly, we would have begun rehearsals for Act II much later. I grossly overestimated the amount of time we would need to get the cast in shape to improvise an entire act and overemphasized the importance of keeping the endings unique from the others. Sometimes avoiding the most obvious things comes at the expense of the audience's viewing experience, and it would have been interesting to have seen what recurs naturally without that pressure. (Many things did, of course, occur naturally and ended up in the final draft.)

And secondly, I would have tightened up scene transitions during Act II. In order to do this, I would have had props and costuming set up onstage within view of the audience, as John Bolden did in the Half-Written Play Festival. My props master and costume designer could then dress actors as they enter and move about so as to avoid long periods of people dressing and gathering props offstage. This also would have given those two designers a more active role each night and further emphasized the experimental nature of the work.

On April 2, 2022, the original cast and crew got together and performed a cold reading of the completed *GOD GUN!* script. I'm pleased to say that, after speaking with everyone involved

in the process individually, it was a well-received finale. Our audience laughed and cried along with us as we put a pin in what had been a successful theatrical experiment.

The Future Life of *GOD GUN!*

I'm proud to announce that *GOD GUN!* is already receiving a second life at the May River Theatre in Bluffton, SC. The show will run for a week this coming June as part of their Emerging Playwrights Festival, along with much of the original cast, including Willis Brei as Harry and myself as Jean. I'm incredibly excited to not only experience the show as an actor but also to simply have the complete story finally told onstage.

I have left the improvisational indicators in my final draft of the script. It's my sincerest hope that future productions retain that aspect of the piece.

In the meantime, I am submitting it to many play festivals, theaters, and universities across the country. From the feedback I've already received, I am confident *GOD GUN!* will continue to have many more lives outside of LSU and outside of this spectacular cast.

In conclusion, *GOD GUN!* is a deeply personal piece of comedy, drama, outrage, absurdism, religion, and atheism. I'm deeply humbled and incredibly grateful to have had collaborators who hopped on this ship with myself at the helm.

Special thanks to my team: Nic Russo, Chase Bernard, Arden Forrand, Adam Gothreaux, Adam Register, Alyssa Paccacio, Crystal Hayner, Emma Massengale, Kate Landry, Andy Lancaster, Brandon Persica, Jackson Munsell, and Logan Naddy. *GOD GUN!* BLESS!

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GOD GUN!

A Comedy of Biblical Proportions

By Sophia Brazda

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CHARACTERS

The only people who work at this entire newspaper, apparently:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| SCOTT BUTLER | Journalist. Ex-Seminarian. Depressive. |
| HARRY PARTRIDGE | Analyst. Best friend. Empathetic. |
| MARTY LINCOLN | Office douchebag. Ex-Frat Boy. Apocalyptic. |
| JEAN DESHOTEL | Head of HR. Ex-Girlfriend. Pragmatic. |
| MICHAEL ANGELO | Editor of <i>The Columbus Post</i> . Absurd but effective. |

SETTING

The offices of *The Columbus Post*.

TIME

Somewhere in the chasm of officespace-time between 2000 and 2010.
Morning.

SCRIPT KEY

- Act or scene titles are centered, fully capitalized, and underlined.
- Stage direction is italicized and indented to the right.
- Character names are fully capitalized, centered for dialogue, and within the rightwards indention for stage direction.
- Direction that is italicized, within a parenthetical, and centered directly below a character name indicates recommended tone or an action on a line.
- A parenthetical within a line indicates an aside or speaking under one's breath.
- A forward slash indicates the interjection of the following line of dialogue.
- An underlined line is a scripted suggestion for a performer to improvise that portion of the dialogue.

ACT I
SCENE 1

Lights up on the offices of The Columbus Post. It's a sprawling array of computers, desks, cubicles, all very modern. Very posh. "You can trust us." Phones are ringing off the hook. There is the continuous sound of typing. Somewhere in the distance someone's put on a pot of coffee. It's clearly a busier-than-normal news day.

At center is the cubicle of one SCOTT BUTLER, his desk cluttered with various personal items, his desktop computer, and his corded office phone. On either side of the cubicle space are white pillars posted with those really corny positive-workspace posters. For instance, on the right hand side, perhaps a, "Hang in there!" or "This too shall pass!" On the stage left pillar, there reads a rather pointed, "Have You Hugged a Human Resources Employee Today?" (*Because This Workplace Does Not Condone Actual Hugging)".*

SCOTT, donned in a button-down and a sports coat, is sitting at a chair in his large cubicle space, looking a tad disheveled. He is bouncing a rubber ball against the wall of the cubicle while staring painfully into the abyss with sullen eyes. He is past the point of caring and is now choosing to sit in his cooled anger like lukewarm piss in a pair of khakis. His best friend, HARRY, sits beside him in another office chair, equally pained but a tad more present. HARRY wears a slightly nicer version of SCOTT's look, elbow patches included. He's leaned forward, deep in Solution Land. He's an analyst. It's kind of what he does.

HARRY

Well.... Okay.

SCOTT

Yep.

HARRY

This is.... a tad problematic.

Oh yeah. SCOTT

Not ideal. HARRY

They might wanna kill me. SCOTT
(*theorizing*)

You.... might die. HARRY

They've been calling all morning. SCOTT

Really? HARRY

In an act of God, SCOTT's office phone starts ringing. In a single, swift motion, SCOTT very coolly stops bouncing the ball, picks up the receiver, and slams it down again, locking eyes with HARRY the whole time.

HARRY (cont.)
Well, maybe it isn't even *about* the article. It's not like *The Post* has a particularly *rabid* fanbase.

SCOTT
(*"au contraire"*)
My *mother* reads *The Post* front to back every single morning and then cuts and pastes any articles of mine into a huge scrapbook entitled, "Scott: News." Then, she brings the scrapbook to her bridge group every Wednesday and reads each of them out loud to Barbara, Suellen, and Carol....who are *all* likely candidates, by the way....

HARRY
I'm assuming Barbara, Suellen, and Carol aren't exactly *socialist-anarchists* with a thirst for blood?

SCOTT
Barbara's a chastity speaker, Suellen makes the annual Lenten plate lunches, and Carol once told me that I "*look like a young Robert Redford and not in a good way*".

HARRY
Well, I'm sure she has a *very* good, *entirely* unrelated reason.

The phone rings again. SCOTT quickly lifts it up and sets it down. He sighs deeply.

SCOTT

We'll have to ask Carol at the next sleepover, Harry.

SCOTT returns to bouncing his ball.

HARRY
(*carefully*)

None of this has anything to do with – ?

SCOTT
(*snapping, quickly*)

No. Nope. No.

HARRY
(*defensively*)

Okay! Just checking.

SCOTT
(*mimicking HARRY*)

No, I have a *very* good, *entirely* unrelated reason.

HARRY
(*concernedly*)

Because you look.... *Sickly*. And.... frankly, malnourished.

SCOTT frustratedly throws the ball against the cubicle wall, this time with much greater force.

BOOM! A thunderous roar coincides with the ball colliding with the wall.

HARRY and SCOTT look around, alarmed. SCOTT examines his hand, blown away by his own strength.

MARTY saunters onstage, holding a stack of paperwork and a coffee mug. His fly is down, and his whole outfit reads, "Guy Who Just Bought a Boat."

MARTY

(*a la fraternity boy, pronouncing "XII" as "Xii"*)

Welllllll, isn't it Pope Judas the Xii! HA-HA.

He leans against SCOTT's desk, coy. He slips, catches himself. In doing so, he mimes spilling his mug of coffee all over HARRY, who briefly panics.

MARTY (cont.)
(*scare tactic*)

COFFEE!

He reveals the mug is empty.

MARTY (cont.)
(*with a wicked smile*)

(It's empty.)

MARTY gets comfortable.

MARTY (cont.)
(*pompously*)

That's a little ancient Roman for your Monday morning: *it means twelve.*

HARRY
(*curt*)

Marty.

SCOTT
(*jaded*)

Hey, Marty.

MARTY
(*addressing them both*)

Scotty B. Harry P.

He dramatically drops the stack of paperwork onto Scott's desk.

MARTY (cont.)

You, uh, know what these are?

SCOTT
(*under his breath*)

Cease and desists?

MARTY

Complaints. Seems your little article-smarticle has caused quite a stir in the neighborhood. And by neighborhood, I mean, the continental United States....

He pulls a sheet from the stack and places it atop.

MARTY (cont.)

...and Hawaii. Nice.

He offers SCOTT a fistbump. Confused, SCOTT goes for it.

MARTY pulls away, jokingly, just before they brush knuckles.

MARTY (cont.)

Wuh-oh! Nuh-uh, you are *not* in the spank-bank, Anne Frank.

MARTY looks directly at the audience.

MARTY (cont.)

(declaratively)

It's cool, I can say that.

He turns back to the boys to clarify.

MARTY (cont.)

Nah, the old ball and chain would *not* be pleased.

He turns to HARRY.

MARTY (cont.)

(aside)

(My waifu.)

HARRY

Yeah, I know, Marty.

MARTY

(back to SCOTT)

Well, anywho, seems to all be going just like you planned it, I'd imagine. Bra-VO, mi amigo.

SCOTT

Please. It's a simple op-ed. I didn't mean to upset / any-

MARTY grabs a paper and reads.

MARTY

(reading)

/ “Opinion: Global Phenomena Born of Natural Causes.” Tagline.... “Made Out to be Ragnarok by Trigger-Happy Western Christians.”*ooof*. AND a direct retaliation to my own article, “Lucifer? I Hardly Know Her!: How to Prepare Your Family’s Souls for What is Most Definitely the End Times without a Shadow of a Doubt” by *The Martin Lincoln*. Look, I’m just saying, if you *weren’t* trying to piss somebody off, then you have an undiscovered talent, bro-bro.

HARRY rolls his eyes and grabs hold of the papers, begins skimming through them. He then produces a complaint from the stack.

HARRY

(holding up the paper)

Yeah, this one’s from you.

MARTY

Like I was saying. Undiscovered talent.

HARRY

(reading)

You misspelled “misanthrope,” and.... “Marty”....

MARTY

(quickly, relaxed)

So I got a little heated, it’s all good, we’re all professionals here, no problem, I got held back in the fifth grade three times, we’re cool, no stress.

HARRY takes out a pen and begins making corrections. He can’t help himself.

SCOTT turns to his computer. MARTY has lost his audience. He gets a little antsy.

MARTY (cont.)

Scotty, didn’t you, uh, used to be a Man of the Collar, too?

SCOTT

(without turning around)

I was a seminarian, Marty. Not a priest.

MARTY

(chuckling)

But *STILL!* Ho-ho.

SCOTT

And that was a long time ago.

MARTY

What happened? What, you got *blue balls* or something?

MARTY continues laughing to himself for a moment, then he stops, stone-faced.

MARTY (cont.)
(*very serious*)

Or was it like in that movie.

SCOTT
(*without turning around*)

Uh-huh.

MARTY
(*very serious*)

The one with Mark Ruffalo.

SCOTT

Mm-hm.

MARTY
(*serious, quickly*)

And the chick from *Eurovision: the Story of Fire Saga*.

SCOTT

Yep.

MARTY
(*still on it*)

She was the Time Traveler's wife.

SCOTT

Uh-huh.

MARTY
(*confusing himself*)

The one where they were like, "Stop touching those kids".... But the priests were like.... "Nah"?

MARTY trails off and stares into space like he's processing the immensity of the universe. This pause lasts for several thousand years, until—

HARRY finishes looking through the papers and decides to intercede. He hands MARTY his corrected complaint.

HARRY

Marty, this has been lovely, like always, but now's really not the best time.

MARTY

Okay, okay, I'm picking up what you're putting down, I am. Just thought I'd pop on by and show you these. Some of them are nas-tay.

HARRY

Yeah, well, it wouldn't be the first time an op-ed's gotten a large response. It's not the end of the world.

MARTY

HA!

Beat.

MARTY looks to SCOTT and HARRY and notices they do not get the joke or are even aware that they made one.

MARTY (cont.)

Um. Have you guys been paying attention at all to what's been going on out there?

SCOTT and HARRY look at each other.

SCOTT

Been a little preoccupied.

HARRY

I mean, I know things are bad. They've *been* bad for a while. Global warming and all.

SCOTT

(obviously)

Yeah, global warming / and shit.

HARRY

(overlapping in agreement)

/ And shit, right.

MARTY

(uncomfortable)

Let's say things have.... *Escalated.*

HARRY
Escalated?

MARTY
(thinking he's asking for a synonym)
Um.... "Climaxed"?

He goes to high-five HARRY, who doesn't flinch.

MARTY (cont.)
(recovering at record speed)
In the past hour, there's already been six new sinkholes in the east, three hurricanes making landfall in the south, and even more wildfires in the west than yesterday. There's even a report we got about ten minutes ago that claims the Yellowstone Supervolcano is set to blow.

Stunned silence.

HARRY
Well. Shit.

SCOTT
Been, uh. Really busy.

HARRY
Really, really busy.

The phone rings again. HARRY quickly reaches over, picks up, and slams down the receiver.

SCOTT
Marty, that sounds horrible and all, but isn't that just.... Climate change?

MARTY
(laughing)
NAHHHH, man, that shit's not real.

HARRY
(concerned)
What, climate change?

MARTY
(suddenly very serious, directly to the audience)
Change.

SCOTT and HARRY look off in the distance trying to see what he's looking at.

MARTY tears himself away from his brief philosophical liaison.

MARTY (cont.)

That's not it, though, amigos. Some people.... Some people say they're *seeing* things.

HARRY

Seeing things?

SCOTT

Like what? Smoke? From the....wildfires?

MARTY

Nah, man. Like.... *Come here.*

He looks around, paranoid, and motions the boys to get closer to him.

They don't move.

MARTY continues surveying, then notices they are not following his orders.

MARTY (cont.)

(teeth clenched for secrecy's sake)

(COME. HERE.)

SCOTT and HARRY begrudgingly do so.

MARTY looks about once more, then drops the bombshell.

MARTY (cont.)

(whispering)

Like Doomsday-level miracle, apparition-y, Jesus-y *shit*.

SCOTT suppresses a laugh. They all lean away.

SCOTT

Of course.

MARTY

Nah, man! Like, for real! We're talking sun dancing, water-into-wine, the-face-of-Jesus-on-a-piece-of-pita-bread-level shit! Pope's calling for a special council. Everybody's going, too. All the major church leaders, Dalai Lama, even the Mormons. And they're saying.... They're saying....

HARRY
 What?

MARTY
 They're saying it's...*the End Times*.

With his words, the lights briefly flicker on and off.

Beat.

MARTY does a "mind blown" gesture.

*HARRY and SCOTT look at each other
 incredulously.*

SCOTT
 Marty, if you actually believed it was the End Times, then why are you at work?

MARTY
 ("well, duh")
 Wife and I are taking that cruise in November. *Cancun*. Can't waste my vacation days, dog.
 Besides, it's a big news day. Boss-Man would be fumin' if I didn't come in.

*In another act of God, MICHAEL ANGELO, the
 Editor of The Columbus Post, enters slurping a big
 mug of coffee. Everything about this man reads,
 "TV Dad" from the Saul Goodman suit to the
 suspenders and right up to the glasses. He's
 gleefully humming, "It's the End of the World as We
 Know It (And I Feel Fine)" by R.E.M.*

MICHAEL nods to the men as he crosses.

MICHAEL
 (addressing the men)
 Fellas. (Martin.) Big news! The sky is literally on fire!

MARTY
 (kissing ass)
 That's great, Mr. Angelo.

*A solid five seconds of MICHAEL taking a
 ginormous slurp of coffee.*

MICHAEL
 Welp. Hop to it!

He exits.

MARTY sighs.

MARTY

Well, you heard the Boss-Man. Gotta get back on it. I'm gonna, uh, leave these with you. See if you want to respond to any of them. I just, uh, wouldn't be counting on canonisation anytime soon. HA.

MARTY moves to leave.

HARRY

See you, Marty.

SCOTT

Bye, Marty.

MARTY doubles back.

MARTY

Oh, and, uh, Scott.... Where does Jean stand on the whole.... Afterlife.... Biz? Like.... She good to go?

SCOTT freezes at her name.

SCOTT

(seething)

Why do you ask, Martin?

MARTY

("no big whoop")

It's rough out there. Just seein' if she needs a little support, you know. Considering.

Beat.

MARTY (cont.)

Really is a shame what happened between you two. Seems as long as I can remember it was Jean and Scott, Scott and Jea- !

HARRY cuts him off and physically turns him around.

HARRY

Alright, Happy Doomsday, Marty. Bye.

MARTY exits in his usual saunter.

HARRY watches him go, mystified.

HARRY (cont.)

(bewildered, a painful reminder of MARTY's biography)

His wife's a neurosurgeon.

Beat.

HARRY and SCOTT sit in silence.

SCOTT

(sorta to himself)

The end of the fucking world, huh?

HARRY

You believe it?

SCOTT laughs obviously and grabs one of the complaint papers and reads it aloud.

SCOTT

(quoting himself)

"There is nothing in this world that cannot be explained away. As a practitioner of catholicism for 25 years and an adventurer of further theologies for another ten, it is my surest and firmest belief that if these were all signs it was the End of the World, we would surely know. To quote Ezekiel 37:13, 'Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them'.... So it is not until my grandmother's rotting corpse is sitting at my breakfast table that I will take cover in a church or utter a prayer of any kind."

HARRY snorts.

SCOTT sets down the paper.

SCOTT (cont.)

Or something to that effect.

HARRY

So brave. So controversial.

SCOTT

I meant it. *But no*, the sky's on fire, so it must be *magic* and not because of all the damn *wildfires in California*.

HARRY

I'll never know why people would actually rather it be the end of the world.

SCOTT begins coughing. He braces himself on his chair.

HARRY
(worried)

You okay, man?

SCOTT
(snapping, voice shaking, holding in a cough)
I *told* you already. I am *fine*.

SCOTT's face clouds. HARRY takes notice.

HARRY (cont.)
(all-knowing)

Alright, out with it.

Beat.

SCOTT considers his next move.

The dam breaks.

SCOTT
(somber)

She came and got the last of her stuff yesterday.

HARRY

Scott –

SCOTT
And she was completely non-emotional. I don't know why I didn't expect that. It was like, "Business as usual. *See you at work tomorrow,*" and that was that. It wasn't like it was cruel. Or mean. But being so cordial about it.... Like we'd spent half a decade in one long business meeting with each other.... That was somehow worse.

HARRY

I'm sorry, man.

SCOTT
And then she noticed the picture on the desk. The one from our third? On the beach? And Jean goes, "You still have that up?" And I said, "Well, sure, I do, Jean. We only broke up about a week ago." And she said, "I'm just surprised, is all." And I had to make a point of saying, "*Well,* Jean, it's not like you can clean up six years in seven days." And then of course *she* had to say, "Well, the Lord made the world in seven days." And I just wanted to yell, "Sorry I'm not a fucking *sociopath*" – !

SCOTT takes a moment to compose himself. He sighs.

SCOTT (cont.)
(defeated)

After she left, I just sat on the sofa for the longest time. Couldn't watch TV. I tried. Too depressing. All the natural disasters and stuff, people losing their homes and shit.... So I decided to take a bath.

HARRY
(trying to follow)

A bath.

Slowly, the sounds of running water....

SCOTT

I ran the water and got in the tub, and I just laid there for another eternity, just staring up at the ceiling and thinking to myself, "What has it all been for?" And the water kept flowing, and I asked myself, "Who is there to blame?" Because there's gotta be *someone* to blame, right? No one can come out of this a total saint.... I sank six years of my life in the person I thought I was going to be with forever, and there I was, perfectly alone.... And the water started rising, and that thought over and over again, "Who's to blame? Who's to blame?" And I just sort of started sinking in it, and....

The sounds stop. SCOTT looks at his friend.

SCOTT (cont.)

I almost did it, Harry. I swear to God, I almost did it.

HARRY
(calm)

Scott....

SCOTT

But then it hit me. "*Who's to blame?*" Nobody! Nobody's to blame! It's this fucking universe's fault! The world's gone to hell in a handbasket, and there's *nobody* to take it up with! I've been sitting around trying to put it all on Jean, trying to figure out what the hell I did to make her stop loving me all of the fucking sudden, when the truth of it is: *everyone* keeps *looking* for people to *pin all their damn problems on*, God, Satan, family, the government, the planet Mercury – because they think, "Oh, once I figure out who shit on the carpet, they'll come clean it up!" But that's *bullshit*. *NO ONE* is coming to save you. *NO ONE* is coming to clean up the shit. That's on you. Maybe you didn't ask for it. Maybe you didn't deserve it. But it's *yours* now. Congratulations, that's *your* shit to clean now! And you have to clean it! You can't *not* clean it! It's *shit!* Everyone keeps saying the sky's on fire because God decided it should be and not because *they struck the damn match*. So. So. I got out of the bath, put the TV back on, and I wrote.

SCOTT picks up the paper once more.

SCOTT (cont.)

(embittered)

And I stand by every word of it. Some of my old seminarian friends will be horrified, *my mother and her friends* will be horrified, but I stand by my word. And I've got the facts to back it up. Wrote it up, did all my research at the speed of light, shot it to Michael around two in the morning, and it's in print the next day. And anybody who has a problem with it or me, *can suck it.*

On cue, the phone begins to ring again. SCOTT picks it up and SLAMS it down. He crumples the complaint and hurls it across the office space.

Beat.

HARRY

Scott, you need to talk to someone.

SCOTT

I thought you liked it?

HARRY

(frustrated)

I'm not *talking* about the article. I'm *talking* about the "I tried to kill myself" part.

SCOTT

Oh.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

But I didn't.

JEAN (voice)

(from offstage)

MAIL!

JEAN enters, pushing a small cart full of mail, with a large, white box situated at the bottom. Her suit is nice, her hair is up in a ponytail. She looks good in comparison to SCOTT's dismal state. It's business as usual for her as she unloads the envelopes and packages and hands a small stack to HARRY.

Harry. JEAN

HARRY takes his mail with a polite nod.

Jean. HARRY

JEAN goes to the cart once more and produces another small stack for SCOTT. She crosses to him and extends the mail his way.

Scott. JEAN
(hollow)

SCOTT gapes at JEAN, not accepting his mail. Her expression does not change. He remains seated.

They continue to stare at one another in the most intense mail exchange since the 2003 Ricin Letters.

After a moment, SCOTT extends his hand and stoically slaps the mail in JEAN's hands to the floor. His envelopes fall to the ground with a decided PLOP.

Jean. SCOTT

JEAN's expression does not change. She does not move to pick up the mail, and she does not address him. Instead, she goes back to the cart and continues pushing it across the stage.

Harry. JEAN
(“Goodbye,” with a nod)

Jean. HARRY
(swallowing)

MICHAEL! Mail! JEAN
(to MICHAEL, offstage)

JEAN pushes the cart offstage and exits.

HARRY

So glad to see you two getting along.

SCOTT
(gloomily)

Hm.

MARTY jogs onstage with a sense of urgency. He stops at the boys.

MARTY

(really trying to play it cool)

HEY, guys, hey. Quick question. Did either of you get like a magazine of some kind in your mail maybe by accident or by mistake, or....?

HARRY and SCOTT shake their heads.

MARTY (cont.)
(panicked, to himself)

Damn.

MARTY jogs offstage, on a mission.

HARRY turns to SCOTT, as if to continue the, "So you almost tried to kill yourself" conversation, but before he can- !

MICHAEL

(offstage, grandiose)

SWEET HOLY MOTHER OF TOLEDO, MARY, AND JOSEPH ROOSEVELT CHRIST!

MARTY comes sprinting back onstage towards MICHAEL's direction.

MARTY
(in a panic)

BOSS, I'M SORRY, I DIDN'T MEAN FOR THAT TO GET SENT TO- !

MARTY exits.

HARRY, a little distracted, turns back towards SCOTT's direction.

HARRY

But I'm serious. You're being *remarkably* cool about this.

SCOTT

Cool.

HARRY

Yeah. I haven't seen you this...I don't know, *bleh* since the day I picked you up from seminary. You didn't tell me anything then, either.

SCOTT

Really, Harry?

HARRY

One moment I think I'm going to your graduation, and the next you're hiding in the trunk of my Porsche ten hours before the ceremony. And you never even told me why.

SCOTT

I shouldn't have had to, Harry.

HARRY

You're missing my point: I'm trying to help, *let me* help, and tell me what I need to know *so* I can help.

SCOTT

I think it's pretty *obvious* –

HARRY

(gaining momentum)

If you just need me to shut up and drive, okay, I can do that, too. But I'd much rather –

Suddenly, SCOTT comes down with another coughing fit. He clutches his chest and nearly falls out of his chair. HARRY goes to him, scrambling to help.

HARRY (cont.)

Scott, are you okay?

SCOTT's coughing subsides a bit, and he scoots himself back up in his chair, waving HARRY off.

SCOTT

(insistent, coughing a bit)

I'm FINE.... I'm okay, Harry, really.... You.... You worry too much.

HARRY lets go of his friend and watches him for a moment, grave.

HARRY
(quietly)

I think I worry enough.

MICHAEL
(offstage, grandiose)

SWEET MOTHER OF MY EX-WIFE STACY AND OUR DAUGHTERS AMBER, CHARLOTTE, AND GERALDINE!

MARTY pops his head out onstage, beaming.

MARTY
(relieved, to SCOTT and HARRY)

Okay, this one's not about me.

MARTY looks directly at the audience again.

MARTY (cont.)
(quickly, proudly)

I sent porn to the office, that is a thing I did.

MICHAEL comes bounding out onstage, furiously confused. His combover is a-flappin'. In his hands is a large, pristine white box that appears recently opened. There is perfect golden lettering on its side: "TO COLUMBUS POST, EDITOR."

MARTY and JEAN trail onstage after him, both looking extremely alarmed.

MICHAEL
(to SCOTT and HARRY)

Do you boys know anything about this?

SCOTT and HARRY jump to their feet.

SCOTT

What? What is that?

HARRY takes the package from MICHAEL and inspects it.

All five coworkers crowd into the cubicle space.

HARRY
(reading)

“To Columbus Post, Editor.” ...No return address?

MICHAEL takes hold of the package.

MICHAEL

Nope, just this.

He displays the underside of the package, “↑,” a large, golden arrow pointed upwards in the place of the return address, and a “↓” pointing downwards in the place of the recipient’s address.

HARRY and SCOTT exchange a look.

SCOTT

Um, sir, I must be missing something.... So it’s kind of a strange package?

MARTY snorts.

MARTY

(Package.)

MICHAEL looks to JEAN. She takes a sharp inhale.

JEAN

Show them, sir.

MICHAEL takes the top off the package and sets it down on SCOTT’s desk. He reaches inside – and in an awkward swoop, takes out a gun.

SCOTT, HARRY, & MARTY

GUN!... Gun, gun, gun... There’s a gun... Gun-o’clock..., wuh-oh....!

ALL duck as he waves it over their heads.

The Gun itself looks extraordinary. It seems to be a handgun of some kind, made out of a kind of pristine, snowy white marble. There is some strange, golden writing along the side, maybe Latin, maybe Greek, maybe Aramaic. It does not appear to be a real gun at all, rather, a brilliant sculptor’s depiction of a gun. Like if Donatello did prop design for Brooklyn 99.

MICHAEL keeps it in his hand, holding it loosely like a kid with a dripping ice cream cone.

MARTY

USPS sent you *that*?

SCOTT

Are we sure it's a real gun?

MICHAEL reaches into the box and pulls out what appears to be a golden bullet. He loads a round into the chamber, pulls, and releases it.

The other four duck once more.

MICHAEL

(pleasantly and factually answering the question)

Ah, so it seems!

JEAN

(anxiety rising)

Sir! As Head of HR, I feel it's my job to say this is extremely inappropriate!

MICHAEL

(very calm, very genuine, very Disney Dad)

Oh. Sorry, Jeanie. Which part in particular?

JEAN

(still panicked)

Sir – just – put down the gun.

MICHAEL

(chipper)

You got it, cap'n!

He lowers the Gun, then turns to MARTY.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(sharing a toy)

You want to hold it?

MARTY takes the Gun excitedly.

MARTY

(tweaking)

Um.... YES?

He immediately begins assuming a series of iconic movie/TV gun-aiming poses.

JEAN can't take it anymore. She crosses to MARTY and takes the Gun out of his hand.

JEAN
(taking it from MARTY)

NO, no, no, okay. *I'll* hold the gun.

She holds it in her hands like it's a hot pot. But at least it's safe.

MARTY is extremely disappointed.

MARTY
(bitter, sarcastic)

Um, *SURE*, Jean, *you can have a turn.*

MICHAEL puts an arm around MARTY. It's a solemn gesture.

Beat.

MICHAEL breaks the collective disappointed silence.

MICHAEL
(paternally)

It's just— you really should've just *asked* Marty if you wanted a turn, Jeanie.

MARTY

Yeah, *Jean*.

SCOTT

Yeah, *Jean*.

HARRY elbows SCOTT in the side.

JEAN
(flabbergasted)

SIR, I think it goes without *saying* that HR does not approve of firearms in the office.

MICHAEL
(to the boys, aside)

(And HR probably wouldn't approve of you being a raging bitch.)

*The boys giggle. MARTY low-fives MICHAEL.
HARRY tries hard not to.*

JEAN
(“What did I do?”)

Wha- ?!

*JEAN is flabbergasted, so she looks to HARRY for
back-up.*

Okay! God. *I’ll* hold the gun.

HARRY

HARRY takes the Gun from JEAN.

JEAN
(exasperated)

FINE! Whatever! So long as it’s safe.

HARRY

Cool. What now?

MICHAEL
(to JEAN)

Jeanie, show them the note.

SCOTT

There’s a note?

*JEAN goes to the box and produces a small, white
card. The same golden lettering from the outside of
the box can be seen written on the card itself.*

JEAN swallows. Everyone is listening intently.

JEAN
(shakily)

Uh.... “Editor of the Columbus Post: Send your best people. We have a few things we need to clear up. Sincerely.... G.”

SCOTT

“G”?

Pause. No one wants to be the one who says it.

Except MARTY, who breaks away from the group and addresses them like Sherlock Holmes, solving a case.

MARTY
(obviously)

Is nobody gonna say it? *Wow*, am I the only person who – ? Okay. *Wow*. Well, you guys aren't going to believe it, but *think about it*. *Flow* with me for a moment. Fire in the sky? Sinkholes? "The End Times"? Then, *this*? I think it's pretty obvious –

SCOTT
(darkly bemused)

"*God.*"

MARTY
(a second too late)

– GOD! (...*Dammit.*)

Beat.

SCOTT starts laughing.

SCOTT
That's good. That's pretty fucking funny.

MICHAEL joins him.

MICHAEL
(chuckling)

It IS, isn't it? It's simply – !

JEAN
(interjecting, very serious)

Inappropriate.

MICHAEL
(clearing his throat, sobering up)

– *Inappropriate*. Yes. Very inappropriate. A gun sent to the office? No way, Jose.

He turns to HARRY and SCOTT again.

MICHAEL (cont.)
So you boys don't know anything about this? No calls placed, nothing in the complaints that might point to someone doing something like this?

HARRY and SCOTT shake their heads.

MICHAEL sighs and turns to JEAN.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Well, Jean, go place a call to the police. Tell them what we've got.

JEAN, relieved, like, "This is what we should've been doing all along," exits to go call the police.

MICHAEL chuckles.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(to SCOTT)

Well, Scott, that was one *hell* of an op-ed you wrote. In all my years in journalism, never has a readership been so outraged they've literally sent *firearms* to the office. Bra-vo.

SCOTT

Uh.... thank you, sir?

MICHAEL pats him on the back.

MICHAEL

Good man.

MICHAEL turns to exit.

SCOTT

(realization hitting him)

Um, sir? Should I be worried? I mean – am I in danger?

MICHAEL stops and turns back to SCOTT.

MICHAEL

(laughing)

I don't know, Scott.... Unless you've got any plans for that gun?

This lands slightly more on the nose than he perhaps intended.

SCOTT blinks.

SCOTT

No?

MICHAEL

Then, *no*, I wouldn't be worried. Besides, they sent a gun, not a marksman.

MICHAEL turns to go once more. This time, HARRY stops him.

HARRY

(referencing the weapon still in his hands)

Um, sir, what do I do with this?

MICHAEL stops, genuinely stumped.

MICHAEL

Hm. Maybe let Marty hold it? I don't think he got a turn.

MICHAEL exits.

MARTY stands by, smiling, arms outstretched.

MARTY

Hit me, mi amigo.

HARRY

Marty, and I'm not being dramatic by saying this, but I would sooner shoot myself.

MARTY trudges off, moping.

HARRY and SCOTT stand for a moment in silence, a gun between them.

HARRY

Pretty funny prank, though, huh?

SCOTT

There's some humor in it, sure.

SCOTT's brow furrows and he bends to look at the Gun in HARRY's hands.

SCOTT (cont.)

(squinting at the writing on the side of the Gun)

"....Est ille.... reputatus... in margine error."

HARRY

What does it mean?

SCOTT

It's shitty Latin. "Accounting for the margin of error."

Well, that's.... Thorough.

HARRY

SCOTT's mind is somewhere else. HARRY grows concerned because he doesn't know where.

Harry, do you believe in God?

SCOTT

HARRY considers this for a moment.

I believe in people.

HARRY

MARTY (voice)

(yelling from offstage)

"I BELIEVE IN PEOPLE"... HERE'S THREE THINGS THAT I BELIEVE IN: NUMBER ONE: SNITCHES GET STITCHES, NUMBER TWO: BILL CLINTON DID NOTHING WRONG, AND NUMBER THREE: YOU'RE FUCKIN' GAAAAAY.

HARRY

(to SCOTT, at the end of his rope)

I hate him, Scott, I hate him so much – !

SCOTT

(consoling HARRY, almost amused)

I know, Harry, I know.

The phone starts ringing again. This time, when SCOTT picks it up, he pauses for a moment, like he actually might say something this time, but after a second passes, he dismisses the urge and puts it down again.

Then – !

JEAN

(alarmed, from offstage)

SCOTT!

SCOTT

(concerned, turning to the sound of her voice)

Jean?!

JEAN comes running onstage. She stops before SCOTT and HARRY.

She's panting. Sweating. Stark white. Like she's just seen a ghost.

SCOTT goes to her.

HARRY

Jean, what's wrong? Did you call the police?

JEAN

(shaking, barely making out the words)

I.... did.... Yes.

SCOTT

You called?

JEAN

(sheer terror)

But.... the police.... *Didn't*.... Pick up....

HARRY

(confused)

They didn't pick up?

SCOTT

(catching on to her meaning)

Who did?

JEAN

My.... *my dad*....

HARRY

Your.... Dad?

SCOTT

You heard your dad's voice on the other end?

JEAN nods slowly.

JEAN

(breathing hard)

I.... I thought I was just imagining it.... You know, sometimes you smell.... Their cologne or.... Think you see them on the street.... But.... But this was his voice. So I hung up and called again. 9-1-1. And it was his voice again. So I dialed again and again I dialed. Every time.... My dad. And.... and....

What?

SCOTT

JEAN

Every time.... Every single time.... He said, "Jeanie Beanie..... Jeanie Beanie, you need to send someone. He needs to speak with someone."

These words hang in the air for a moment. No one even looks at each other.

HARRY

You're sure that's what you heard?

JEAN's eyes narrow.

JEAN

I'm not crazy, Harry. Yes, I'm sure that's what I heard.

SCOTT pulls HARRY aside once more.

HARRY

(low)

So this is very non-Jean-like.

SCOTT

She's barely even talked about her father since his funeral. He's not.... an open topic.

JEAN watches them conferring and decides to include herself.

JEAN

(very serious)

I know it sounds crazy, but look, I can't even get hold of an operator. And now, it's just a busy signal.

She holds up the phone so the boys can hear, which blasts a faint busy signal.

JEAN (cont.)

(desperate, to SCOTT)

Come on, Scott. You know I wouldn't lie about this.

SCOTT hesitates.

JEAN (cont.)

Are you KIDDING ME – ?

SCOTT confronts her.

SCOTT
(defensive)

I honestly don't know what you would or wouldn't lie about, Jean! Since I'm a total *stranger* to you now!

JEAN

Oh, *OKAY* – !

HARRY tries to get between them but is unsuccessful.

HARRY
(trying to mediate)

Guys, please, can we just....?

JEAN

You've been acting like an absolute child all day! All week! *Fuck*, for the past year. *Throwing* your little fits, *freaking out* when you don't get your way. *I'm sorry* if I feel a little *awkward* around you since we broke up – !

SCOTT
(trying to talk over her)

– Since *YOU* broke up with *ME*, right, right – !

JEAN

– But none of that's even really your *problem* anymore, I mean, *GOD*, can we please try to act a little professionally?

SCOTT
(cruelly making fun of her)

OH, “professionally”?

JEAN

You slapped MAIL out of my hands!

SCOTT

And you wouldn't marry me after SIX YEARS!

Silence.

JEAN watches SCOTT.

SCOTT (cont.)

(with increasing emotion)

Not “one day”! Not “maybe down the line”! “No.” You said, “No,” Jean. And not only that, you said, “Never”. And now, for the past week, I’ve had all our friends calling and texting me asking what happened and what I did wrong and why I had to go and screw *that* one up, and I honestly don’t know what to tell them! I mean, *fuck*, Jean, what did I do *so* wrong? I thought we were happy. Weren’t we happy? Weren’t you happy?

JEAN stares at the floor.

SCOTT (cont.)

You were the one thing I was ever sure about. And you left, and I’m alone. And it feels like the world is ending.

Before she can respond, MICHAEL comes running back onstage. He stops at the group, pats his shining forehead with a handkerchief, and tries to regain his composure.

MICHAEL

(trying to stay chipper and composed)

Good news, folks! *The world is ending!*

He goes behind JEAN and puppets her arms around in flapping celebration a la Kermit the Frog.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(pretending to do JEAN’s voice)

“Oh no, my children!”

Beat. MICHAEL lets a very unentertained JEAN go.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Well, I just got a little call from *Vatican City*.

SCOTT’s eyes grow huge.

SCOTT

...*And?*

MICHAEL

Had a little chat with the pope. He’s, um, he’s very senile.

Beat.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Uh... Oh yeah, he wants to know what we're going to do with that there gun.

He points to the Gun still in HARRY's hand.

HARRY

(rising panic)

Well, how does he *know* about the gun?

MICHAEL chuckles, dryly. Dabs his forehead.

MICHAEL

This one's a *hoot*. Evidently.... um.... An *angel*, told him to, uh, "send our best people". Ha.

Beat.

MICHAEL (cont.)

What a *goofy* day!

They all look at each other, terror, shock, and confusion rising. JEAN stands at alert.

HARRY

"*Send our best people*"? What....?

His eyes, and everyone else's, follow down to the Gun in his hands.....

Oh.

SCOTT is lost in deep thought, running through every possible explanation. JEAN puts her hand over her mouth.

JEAN

Oh my God.

HARRY waves her off.

HARRY

Okay, no. Everybody calm down. We're playing off of our emotions here.

SCOTT tunes back in.

SCOTT

Harry's right. There is absolutely no outstanding evidence that any of this – !

Before he can finish, the Gun in HARRY's hands starts glowing a bright, celestial glow.

All gasp.

HARRY panics and almost drops it but hangs on tightly.

HARRY
(sheer terror)

UH.... SCOTT?

SCOTT stares at the Gun, ancient fears and even more ancient beliefs rising in his throat, stopping him from uttering a word.

The Gun dims.

MARTY enters, phone on his ear. He's waving his arms to get his coworkers' attention.

MARTY
(on the phone)

Mr. President?!

Taking the phone off his ear, MARTY looks to his coworkers for assistance. They gape back at him. HARRY, stunned, shrugs. MARTY looks like a fish.

He brings the phone back up to his ear.

MARTY (cont.)
(on the phone, nom de plume)

....Yes, this is...uh... "Marty".

Everyone watches, dumbfounded, while MARTY nods along to the President of the United States.

MARTY (cont.)

Mm-hm. Yes, sir.... Alright.... No, sir.... Okay.

He takes the phone off his ear and covers it with his hand.

MARTY (cont.)

(to MICHAEL, whispering loudly)

He says he wants to know who you're sending to interview God.

ALL just sort of gape back at him.

MARTY stands helplessly, on the phone with the leader of the free world.

Beat.

MARTY (cont.)

(to ALL, still whispering loudly)

So I feel like we should probably answer him.

MICHAEL rushes over and takes the phone.

MICHAEL

(on the phone)

Sir! Sir, yes, sir. Yessir. We'll let you know as soon as we know.I understand, sir. Happy Apocalypse to you, too, sir.

He hangs up the phone.

Beat. Beat. Beat.

Everyone looks to MICHAEL, desperate for some direction.

MICHAEL sighs, places his hands behind his back, and handles it the best he knows how.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(addressing his troops)

Folks. It is with much chagrin that I announce to you that it seems it is, indeed, The End Times of this little planet we call Earth.... Contrary to what Mr. Butler here would have you believe....

Collective looks to SCOTT.

SCOTT

(in response to everyone)

What?

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

(referencing the stack of complaints, then the Gun package)

Before you start the firing squad, I'd care to remind you that I wrote *this*.... before all of *this*.

JEAN

You're telling me you still stand by everything you said in that article?

SCOTT

(at a loss for words)

Well.... *No*. I mean, you have to remember, at the time— No, no, I don't. There is new evidence, so clearly, I would need to redo my research and come to a new conclusion.... *No, Jean*, that would be insanity.

HARRY

(to himself)

This *is* insanity.

SCOTT

Yes! Thank you, Harry. This *is* insanity. How does *anyone* know what to make of *any* of this?

MARTY

(obviously)

Uhhh... I know I've arrived at some sort of conclusion.

SCOTT

(snapping)

Yeah, well, that's because you're a fucking idiot, Marty.

MARTY grows visibly upset.

MICHAEL

(getting between them)

Whoaaaaa, there!

MICHAEL comforts MARTY and looks at SCOTT with disappointment.

SCOTT (cont.)

(pacifying the group, then to MARTY)

Sorry! Sorry..... I'm sorry, Marty.

MARTY

(bitter)

Yeah, why don't you write an op-ed about it?

MICHAEL looks to his subordinates, like, “Can I finish?”

SCOTT shuts up.

MICHAEL

(proudly, like one of the great generals)

And what we are clearly dealing with here is a much larger power at work. And so, just as I would in cases of alien or Soviet invasion, I am going to propose that we, the offices of The Concubine Loaf—

ALL

(muttering)

The Columbus Post—

MICHAEL

(quickly correcting his mistake)

Columbus!I propose that we do the right thing here.... And submit to these demands!

JEAN nods gravely.

MARTY nods vigorously.

SCOTT looks sick.

HARRY holds the Gun as far away from the rest of the group as possible.

HARRY

No. No way. *We are not killing someone to go on some hippie-dippie mission to interview God.*

MICHAEL lets out a laugh.

MICHAEL

NO! No, I'm not suggesting THAT!

HARRY looks relieved.

MICHAEL walks over to HARRY, pressing the Gun, still in HARRY's hands, to his own temple.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(pleased with himself, miming suicide)

No, I'm suggesting we get someone to kill *themselves* to go and interview God. Please. We're not visigoths.

HARRY tenses up once more, holds the Gun up in the air, out of anyone's reach.

HARRY

You guys are all crazy.

SCOTT

(to himself)

“The dead will rise from their graves....”

HARRY

(to SCOTT, worriedly)

Huh?

SCOTT

(lost in extremely deep thought)

...Let's hear him out, Harry.

HARRY

Have you lost your *mind*?

MICHAEL is pleased by this.

MICHAEL

Great. Now, let's handle this efficiently. Going by paygrade, experience, and leadership skills, I should clearly be the one to go and interview God. But unfortunately, I have a round of golf scheduled this afternoon with the editor of *The New York Post*, so I am regrettably detained. Next in the line of succession is Marty....

MARTY grows alarmed.

MICHAEL (cont.)

...but we all know that would be a horrible idea.

MARTY breathes a sigh of relief.

MICHAEL thinks for a moment.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Let's try it this way. Who here knows the most about all things theological, biblical, spiritual, and apostolic?

MARTY

(quickly)

Scotty B. used to be a priest!

SCOTT
(quickly)

Seminarian. I was never a priest.

MARTY flips SCOTT off with both hands.

MICHAEL
(“how quaint”)

I had forgotten about that! Wonderful. Scott, are you free this evening?

HARRY
(the only sane person left in the room)

ARE YOU *SERIOUS*?

SCOTT
(at a loss for words)

I.... um.... Look, I left all that behind for a reason. The Big Guy and I aren't exactly on the best terms.

HARRY stomps over to SCOTT's office desk phone, the Gun still firmly in his hand.

HARRY
(parental)

Scott, don't entertain him. Jean, HR doesn't have a problem with this at *all*?

JEAN looks back at him, desperately.

JEAN
Harry, I just spoke to my *deceased father*. I think these are extenuating circumstances.

HARRY begins dialing for the police.

HARRY
That's it. I'm calling the police. This has gone on long enough.

It rings for a moment, then—

HARRY (cont.)
Yes, hello. I'm an employee at *The Columbus Post*, and — !

HARRY's entire expression changes.

A few moments pass. Everyone watches as HARRY listens to someone's voice for the first time in decades.

He hangs up the phone, tears in his eyes, completely at a loss for words.

SCOTT

Harry? Are you alright?

HARRY

(voice breaking)

That was my mom.

Beat.

SCOTT puts a hand on HARRY's shoulder. HARRY looks off.

MICHAEL takes this as an opportunity to continue his crusade.

MICHAEL

(cartoonishly)

Well, if we have a problem with that process, let's try it *this* way: Was anyone perhaps *planning* on killing themselves whenever it was convenient *anyway*?

HARRY looks to SCOTT. MICHAEL, MARTY, and JEAN follow his glance, surprised.

JEAN

(quietly)

Scott?

Beat.

MICHAEL

(excitedly)

Scott Butler, if you don't shoot yourself in the head right this very instant, you're fired.

Beat.

SCOTT does not move. Or blink. Or breathe.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(sighing)

Ooookay, then let's try it *this* way: we form a line, you tell me a little about each of your lives, and then *I* will personally rank everyone in order of *least* likely to kill themselves to *most* – !

SCOTT

I'll do it.

MICHAEL lets out a, "Hooray!" JEAN gasps. MARTY's mind is blown by everything that is going on around him. HARRY's face goes slack.

MICHAEL
(celebratory)

Splendid! Scott will go as our representative! This is going to be the story of the century. Fantastic. Just fantastic. And the Creator of the Universe chose us. This is just stupendous. I'm going to call my ex-wife and request an oral sex. Good work, team!

He begins to exit, and on his way out, he removes the Gun from HARRY's feeble hands and gives it to SCOTT, who takes it wordlessly.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(genuine advice, a la Disney Channel dad)

Oh, and if you haven't had your lunch yet, I'd do it then. Don't kill yourself on company time.

His accidental joke hits him hard. He lets out a hearty chuckle. MICHAEL cartoonishly shakes SCOTT's hand and exits.

The rest of them each give SCOTT one last look of pity, awe, maybe heroism?

JEAN gives SCOTT a long, sad look. After a moment, she angrily tears herself away and storms off, confused and furious.

All exit, except for HARRY.

SCOTT, the Gun now in his hands, walks to the opposite side of his desk and attempts to change the mood.

SCOTT
(to HARRY)

Got anything you want me to ask God?

HARRY
(kind of sitting in utter disbelief)

Scott Butler, Vicar of Christ.

SCOTT

Nice to meet ya.

HARRY

Never thought I'd see the day.

SCOTT

The worst part is: my mother's going to be *thrilled*.*Beat.*

SCOTT (cont.)

And yours?

HARRY
(*still in shock*)

Sounded like mine.

SCOTT

Well, if any part of you is unsure, I can confirm shortly.

*HARRY takes a moment.*HARRY
(*choosing his words carefully*)

I don't know.... How I feel about any of this, really. But.... my mom— *or the person who*, you know, *sounded like*....ahem. She.... She said, "I love you, and I promise I'll see you later, but right now, it has to be Scott."

HARRY shakes his head.

HARRY (cont.)

I don't know. I don't know.

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)

What *do* you plan on asking him?

SCOTT

I don't know. Pre-K rules? Favorite colors, pick each other's noses, work from there?

HARRY

Funny.

(It's not funny.)

SCOTT examines the Gun in his hand. He is strangely calm, reflective.

HARRY turns wordlessly and begins to leave.

SCOTT

“Can you spell that?”

HARRY turns back, confused.

HARRY

Huh?

SCOTT remains transfixed on the Gun in his hand.

SCOTT

It just seems so funny.... Like, “Hi, I’m God.” “I’m sorry, can you spell that?” “God, G-O-D, Creator of the Universe.” “Do you enjoy your line of work?” Just uncouth enough to.... Warm him up a little, maybe? Maybe make him laugh a little? Sort of a deterrent from the, “Sorry I didn’t believe in you for *an amount* of years”?

HARRY blinks awkwardly in a helpless kind of way. What’s the appropriate response here?

HARRY

That’s assuming he’s there. At all. I mean. Let’s not forget that.

SCOTT breaks his gaze and looks at his friend.

SCOTT

Right. Of course.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

I know that.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

But it is kind of funny, right? Like, people pray all the time for signs. “If I’m not supposed to do this, God, please give me a sign!”But here I am, sitting here with a gun God *sent* me, with both the President of the United States and the Pope waiting on the line to hear if I’ve off-ed myself or not. I’ve gotten nearly every sign *to* do it. And that’s funny. Like, I really can’t think of another....

He looks to HARRY and chuckles.

SCOTT (cont.)
(chuckling)

Well, I guess, *you* could tell me it's a good idea—

HARRY

I'm not going to do that, Scott.

HARRY, stumped, nods to himself, and then exits.

Beat.

SCOTT lifts the Gun.... Breathes... Raises it to his head.... And....

HARRY comes storming back. He sees that SCOTT is in position and runs towards him, desperate to save him.

HARRY

(running towards SCOTT)

JESUS CHRIST, CAN WE TAKE A SECOND TO ACTUALLY THINK ABOUT THIS?

SCOTT, startled by HARRY's voice, pulls the Gun away from his head. HARRY reaches for the Gun and also yanks it away, accidentally squeezing the trigger as it faces skyward. It accidentally goes off. POP.

SCOTT and HARRY both drop to the ground, arms over their heads.

Beat.

Beat.

Both men check each other, check to see where the Gun landed, and slowly look upwards at the bullethole in the ceiling.

SCOTT

Chekhov.

HARRY

What?

Nevermind.

SCOTT

MICHAEL enters politely, holding a mug of coffee.

MICHAEL
(chipper)

Everything alright in here?

HARRY moves to protest— SCOTT grabs his arm.

SCOTT

All good, Mr. Angelo.

MICHAEL notices the bullethole in the ceiling.

MICHAEL
(chuckling)

Scott, what is that bullet doing in my crown molding and not in your skull?

HARRY pulls out some hair.

SCOTT
(matching MICHAEL's energy)

Just a little mishap, Mr. Angelo! I'll be right on it!

MICHAEL
(bad joke)

Great! Evidently, fire and ash are now raining down from the sky. My pool is *ruined!*

*He lets out a hefty chuckle. SCOTT laughs along.
HARRY does not.*

Laughing. Laughing.

MICHAEL abruptly stops and takes a long sip of his coffee.

MICHAEL

Welp. Hop to it!

MICHAEL exits.

HARRY sighs, searching for the right words.

HARRY

I mean, is this.... Is this really what you want? I know the world may be at stake, I know you've been feeling like your life is aimless and one dark hole, okay, yes, I *know* these things. And I also know you're the best writer in this office. But I can't in good conscience let you do this until you actually consider the fact that you *might die and never come back*, because unlike the other cucks in this office, and the guy who I thought *wrote that op-ed*, I am still holding onto the theory that *all of this can be explained away*. And that *absolutely no one* has to play martyr for the rest of humanity. Certainly not my best friend.

SCOTT says nothing.

HARRY pivots, growing angry. He notices the Human Resources sign posted to the column.

HARRY (cont.)

(turning to SCOTT)

Jean. Is that what this is about? Scott, you're a grown ass man, you don't need me to tell you that killing yourself over a girl is the most pathetic— !

SCOTT

(cutting him off)

It's not— *just* Jean.

Beat. HARRY watches his friend closely, desperate to reach him, memorizing microexpressions just in case these moments are final.

SCOTT sighs.

SCOTT (cont.)

My whole life.... Has been these series of plans. "I'm going to be a priest." "I'm going to be a writer." "I'm going to marry Jean." These series of plans.... That just get scrapped, thrown out with the rest of the garbage, because, yeah, life happens and "*the best laid plans*" and all that.... But there's been this nagging thought in the back of my brain, just sort of wondering.... What if something's just been working against me? What if there's something out there, God, whatever, what have you, that's been carefully navigating me through all of this, steering me away when I get too close? And Harry, I.... I don't *want* to make those plans again. I can't do it. It would kill me. And Jean was just the straw that broke the camel's back. And every day since then, I've *felt* dead. I'm too tired. And I'm too angry. That op-ed? I mean, let's be honest: 90% spite, 10% probably what I actually think. I've been angry at the way the world works for a long time. And frankly, I want to take it up with management. *On* the risk that there might not be a management.... And on the off-chance it actually does a lot of good, saves a lot of lives, and answers a lot of questions.... *Why the hell shouldn't I?*

Long pause.

SCOTT (cont.)
(voice breaking)

I'm tired, Harry. And I'm so angry.... And I need it to have been.... Useful.

SCOTT's words hang in the air.

HARRY studies his friend.

Beat.

Lady Di.

HARRY

What?

SCOTT

Ask him if the royals planned it or not. I've always wanted to know.

HARRY

Thank you.

SCOTT

Fuck off.

HARRY

HARRY embraces his friend.

I love you.

HARRY (cont.)

I.... love you, too.

SCOTT
(mid-hug)

They separate. HARRY is wiping his eyes.

This is fucking crazy, man.

HARRY
(overcome)

SCOTT reaches down and picks the Gun off the ground.

I know.

SCOTT

Outside the office, there is a loud BOOM! The entire building shakes. The lights begin flickering and going out one by one.

Offstage, MARTY is yelling:

MARTY

(voice)

OHHHHH! OH, GOD! OH, THE MOST TERRIBLE THING JUST HAPPENED! OH, GOD, IT'S – IT'S – SLIIIIIIIME! SLIIIIIIIME IS OOZING FROM THE WALLS! JUST – OOOOOOZING! OH, GOD..... HARRY! HARRYYYYY! HELP MEEEE!

HARRY, alarmed, follows MARTY's voice to see.... Stops. He looks back at SCOTT, standing centerstage with the Gun in his hand, nods, takes a moment....

SCOTT waves him on.

HARRY exits.

SCOTT is alone, the only functioning light dangling just above his solitary cubicle.

Another loud BOOM! Offstage collective screaming.

SCOTT cocks the Gun.... Shuts his eyes tight.... Raises the Gun to his head....!

JEAN enters hesitantly, her hands clamped over her eyes. She peeks ever-so-slightly.

JEAN

SCOTT? Did you– ? Have you– ?

She sees he is still very much alive. She breathes a great sigh of relief.

SCOTT lowers the Gun.

JEAN (cont.)

AH, good! You're still....! I didn't want to, uh, see.... The, uh.....

She gestures, "mess," really tastelessly.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)
(confused by her own weird words)

No.... offense?

SCOTT
(blinking)

None.... taken?

Beat.

JEAN
(awkward)

You're looking well.

SCOTT
(deadpan)

Thank you. It's this new thing called "I Just Haven't Killed Myself Yet."

JEAN
(not amused)

Funny.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)
(a little frustrated with her)

....Ask.

JEAN
(thrown)

Huh?

SCOTT

Just ask. It's okay.

JEAN

I don't know what- ?

SCOTT

I know you want to, I would want to. It's okay. Ask.

JEAN wrings her hands.

JEAN
(cautiously)

If.... If you see him.... My dad.... Just ask him.... Ask him if he's at peace?

SCOTT

Jean, I don't even know if I'll see him.

JEAN

I know that. I thought of that.

SCOTT

I'm not suggesting you're not—

JEAN

I know that.... Too.

Years hang in the air.

Guilt builds.

JEAN turns to go.

JEAN (cont.)
(quickly)

I'm sorry! I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked. You don't— owe me anything. You're— You've got a lot— *Fuck*. I'm gonna go.

SCOTT moves to stop her.

SCOTT

Jean! No— It's okay!

JEAN freezes and puts her hands over her face.

JEAN
(muffled, mortified)

It's not *ethical*.

SCOTT

Jean, this job is *literally killing me*.

JEAN snorts, stops. (This is inappropriate.) She removes her hands. Her face grows stoney. She becomes overcome with emotion.

JEAN

(giving it up, guiltily)

You're not....doing this....because of me?

SCOTT looks at the floor.

SCOTT

(a little unsure)

No, Jean. I'm not doing this because of you.

JEAN straightens herself.

JEAN

Okay, then.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

(slowly, choosing words carefully)

I know I've been.... Cold, lately, and.... I'm sorry. You didn't deserve all of that.

SCOTT

And I am... Also...

He just can't form the word "sorry."

JEAN approaches SCOTT and stands beside him.

JEAN

I just don't know how to act around you anymore.

SCOTT

Me either.

Beat.

The two look out from the fourth wall/window at the carnage all around them.

JEAN

I'm sorry about the way things ended.

SCOTT

(to himself)

They didn't have to.

JEAN

But they did. You were ready, I wasn't. Things didn't match up.

SCOTT

They would've. I could've waited. I would've waited for you for as long as you needed...

JEAN

But you had to ask. And ask and ask and ask....

SCOTT

Well, what did you expect, Jean? It had been *six years*.

BOOM! The room shakes. The lights flicker. The pair grow terrified.

SCOTT (cont.)

(a la apocalypse)

I'd venture to say that doesn't really matter now, anyway.

JEAN

(feeling time slipping by)

It's just... *We have so much to talk about.*

There is another loud BOOM outside. The building tremors. Lights flicker.

SCOTT and JEAN grab onto each other. It's a couple moments before either realizes what they're doing. Once they do, it's awkward.

Beat.

SCOTT overcomes it and touches her face softly.

SCOTT

(sincerely)

We'll talk about it later.

They look at each other in the old, familiar way.

SCOTT (cont.)

I'll ask him.

JEAN

What?

SCOTT

("Do I have to spell it out for you?")

If I see him, I will ask him.

JEAN

(hopeful)

Really?

SCOTT

Yeah. A question.... For a question. And an answer because we didn't have one.

JEAN

(sort of stunned)

Thank you.

SCOTT goes in for a hug – JEAN politely recoils.

JEAN (cont.)

Thank you, Scott.

JEAN nods gratefully, cordially. She goes to leave...but doubles back.

JEAN (cont.)

You know how earlier you asked me if I was happy?

SCOTT

Yeah?

JEAN

I was. But I couldn't say yes when I knew you weren't.

JEAN looks at him one last time.... And exits.

SCOTT watches her leave.

He is, once again, alone.

BOOM.

The lights flicker.

SCOTT surveys his cubicle space. He slowly walks about his desk, gently touching the objects strewn out....

BOOM.

SCOTT sits in his office chair directly behind his desk. It doesn't feel right. He stands instead. But that doesn't feel right either.

BOOM.

Finally, he walks over to HARRY's office chair and has a seat. Just right.

BOOM.

SCOTT inspects the Gun.

SCOTT

Four bullets. "Accounting for the margin of error."

He holds the Gun up to his head.

SCOTT (cont.)

Guess even God makes mistakes.

SCOTT takes a big gasp of air and holds his breath.

He fires. POP!

The world goes pitch-black, the final office light giving way.

SCOTT drops to the ground. The Gun clatters beside him.

The office phone immediately starts ringing.

And it rings.

And it rings.

...

The sound of running bathwater.

END OF ACT I

ACT II
SCENE 1

Complete darkness.

Then – the sound of trickling water. It's light and increasingly incessant, like a faucet dripping.

It continues on, gaining in momentum, until it sounds like a small, distant stream.

It flows and flows.... Increasing in tempo until it just gushes, like a waterfall, a dam breaking, the crashing waves of a great flood – gushing, spewing, spattering – UNTIL it is abruptly cut off by the sound of a generator whirring to life –

Lights up on the Offices of the Columbus Post.

Before us is – was – the cubicle of Scott Butler. It remains nearly unchanged since we last left it, with the exception of a large, blue tarp draped over the upper left corner and the office chair beneath it.

JEAN is seated in SCOTT's office chair. She is looking much more disheveled since we last saw her. She watches the office phone downright predatorial. It's evident that this is a game of cat-and-mouse that has been going on for some time.

Beat.

She slowly sinks back into the office chair, tears brimming.

Beat.

She glances at the tarp covering the scene of the crime. She chews on a nail. Her eyes dart back to the phone.

Beat.

Her anxiety surmounts. She picks up the receiver, only to hear a faint dial tone.

JEAN

(overwhelmed, putting her head in her hands)

UGH!

She puts down the receiver, smooths her hair, takes a few deep breaths, and tries to collect herself. Once she is somewhat settled, JEAN finds herself digging through the desk drawer, desperate for something to distract herself.

Her hands pull out a familiar object – SCOTT's bouncing stress-ball. She gazes at it tenderly.

She bounces it once on the desk. Her coordination is near toddler-like. What was supposed to be a sentimental moment is cut short by her failure to easily catch it. She barely grabs hold of it, with both her elbows. She sighs in relief.

JEAN tries once more, but this time, knocks over a cup of ink pens and a picture frame. She leans over, trying to catch everything as well as the ball, making an absolute mess of a holy space.

HARRY enters.

HARRY

Hey.

JEAN jumps, losing hold of the ball once more, throwing it towards her assailant.

HARRY catches it, looks down at it, and smiles softly.

JEAN looks at him apologetically.

JEAN
(in relief)

Harry.

HARRY
(kindly, soft)

Jean.

He tosses the ball back to her.

She catches it with ease, looking a little embarrassed.

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)

How are you doing?

JEAN blinks, surrounded by her little disaster.

JEAN

I'm.... Good.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

...You?

HARRY

(grappling with normalcy)

...Meh.

JEAN

(awkwardly nodding)

Oh, yeah, same, same...

Beat as JEAN tries to be a person.

JEAN (cont.)

...Mondays...

JEAN avoids intimate eye contact and places the ball atop the desk. She rolls it on the desk absentmindedly.

HARRY attempts to reach her.

HARRY

I miss him, too.

Beat.

JEAN

(clearing her throat)

Ahem – It's a lot quieter than I thought it would be.

HARRY

Uh, yeah, it's calmed down. A lot. Like, it's *eerily* normal. Besides all the ash and general destruction, I mean. Nothing active, at the very least. Supervolcanoes all....napping.

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)

Yeah... We, uh, glad we got the generator running. Hopefully that'll hold.

JEAN

(not trying to be rude)

Right, I noticed the lights... were on.

They nod at each other.

JEAN (cont.)

(realizing she might've been rude)

Thank you—

HARRY

Oh, no — /

JEAN

(out of sync)

— For that.

HARRY

(overlapping)

/ — Problem.

JEAN goes back to staring down the phone.

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)

(“Ooo, here’s a topic”)

Phone lines up?

JEAN

There’s a dial tone... *Miraculously...* But...

She sighs and leans back in the desk chair.

JEAN (cont.)

(fear creeping into her voice)

...Radio silence.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

(nervous chuckle, unbreaking stare)

I don't even know what I'm waiting for, I mean....

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

(a tremble to her voice)

...It is so quiet.

HARRY goes to her, empathetic.

JEAN cracks a little, angry.

JEAN (cont.)

(like a mom waiting for a table in a restaurant)

We should've heard something by now. A call, a letter, a fucking – *burning bush* – I mean. *Something.*

HARRY stands beside her, thinking for a moment.

JEAN holds the phone up to her ear just to hear the dial tone again.

HARRY

(on an inhale)

Jean –

JEAN slams down the receiver.

JEAN

(cutting him off, embittered)

Fuck this. Fuck him.

HARRY looks at her, calculating the next appropriate move.

HARRY

You know, Jean, I – I know today has been hard –

JEAN

(seeing where this is going)

You really don't have to –

HARRY

(venturing on anyway)

But I'm here for you... You know? Whatever you need. We've both... Had a loss today... I mean, regardless of how things go –

JEAN

Harry.

HARRY

– I... care about you, and this is all probably untoward... *now*... But after the breakup... He was in bad shape, I mean... You know Scott... And you – You're tough. You've always been the *tougher* one... You know?

JEAN faces HARRY – opens her mouth as if to calmly respond, and very suddenly, bursts into tears.

HARRY (cont.)

(shocked, apologetic)

Hey – ! Hey, Jean, god, I'm – I'm sorry – !

HARRY, fumbling, rushes to her and awkwardly puts his arms around her in an almost-hug.

When she doesn't immediately stop, he sways a bit, an adult rocking another adult.

JEAN

(unable to stop)

I'm sorry, this is really unprofess–

HARRY

(gently)

Jean – *Jean*. It's okay.

JEAN

(mini-nervous breakdown, slightly British?)

No, but it's not, really. It's actually horrible and awful and a fucking monstrosity eating away at my brain and nerve endings and tissues and muscles and it kind of makes me wanna strangle myself with the phone cord, doesn't it?

HARRY pats her head.

HARRY

That's certainly a way to put it, yes.

JEAN takes a few deep breaths and calms herself.

She looks at HARRY gratefully, then at the desk before her with all of Scott's belongings. She picks up the ball.

JEAN

Harry, do you believe in God?

HARRY lightly chuckles exasperatedly.

JEAN (cont.)
(concerned)

What? Did I say something – ? I didn't mean to –

HARRY

No, no, it's okay. You're just – Not the first person to ask me that today.

He takes a moment to reconsider the question.

HARRY (cont.)

I mean... The laws of mathematics... The...mere *existence* of human consciousness, like, what are these thoughts I'm having now? Why do I have them? ...For one... The... Religious instinct of all humans, of ancient cultures.... Physics. Synapses in the brain. The Big Bang. The building blocks of the universe... I don't know... *Do I believe in God?*

He sighs.

HARRY (cont.)

My mom would take me to church every Sunday when I was little. I used to love going. We'd get dressed up, and it was – peaceful. Coffee and donuts. It didn't have to be explained, it didn't have to be proven or not proven. It just – was. I haven't gone since she died. And that was....ten years ago. And I didn't feel that peace for a long time.

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)

....Until today. Ha. Hearing her voice again... The more I replay it, the more real it gets. If God is just that feeling – of hearing someone's voice again when you thought you never would – then *do I believe in God?*

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)

Scott...had to go somewhere. And maybe wherever that somewhere is, is God. Or maybe "God" is just...the hope, or the belief, or the *decision* to believe...that he comes back. That one day things will be okay. Maybe...

Beat.

HARRY (cont.)
(emotion rising in his voice)

So maybe I do. Just for today.

JEAN watches him for a moment, then laughs.

JEAN
(poking fun)

That was the biggest *non-answer* –

HARRY laughs.

HARRY
 I know, I know – Ask me... Ask me again when the world *isn't* ending, okay? I can't think clearly, I've got a cosmic *gun to my head*.

They stop laughing. HARRY pulls at his tie.

HARRY (cont.)
(clearing his throat)

Ahem.

JEAN picks up the blue rubber ball.

JEAN
(eyes on the ball)

You wanna know the worst part? The other day, when I went over to his place to get a bunch of my stuff, we, uh, we sorta got into it. Yelling and stuff. And I was so mad... And I said... I said, "I wish you were dead."

Beat.

...I didn't mean it, but –

JEAN (cont.)

HARRY
 I know. We all – say things.

Beat.

JEAN

(uncontrollably reminiscent)

You know, sometimes he would... Burst in, with some kind of surprise or some kind of new “big plan”... And one day, he came in, ran up to me, and said, “Jeanie, we’re getting a dog.” And I said that we didn’t have the space for one, and he just goes, “We’ll make the space. Everybody’s gotta have a dog. We need a dog.” And he got like that, you know, every couple weeks... When he started feeling stuck.... So I *knew* this would, like, blow over. This was just a Scott Plan. But no, no – the next day I come in from work, and he’s gotten this huge, metal kennel. “It’s for the dog! We’re gonna get a big dog!” And I’m all, “Okay, okay, sure, Scott.” And then the next day I come in and I see he’s gotten three bags of dog food. “Dog’s gotta eat!” “Oh, of *course*, Scott...” And it wasn’t like I didn’t *want* to believe him. It was just that, I mean, after so many of these...half-assed adventures...the law school idea, getting his masters, that one month he was *convinced* he’d go back to seminary... Oh, he didn’t mention that one, did he?.... You just.... Start to coast. And then one day he asks you to marry him and you have to wonder... Will he still want to in one week?

She sighs.

JEAN (cont.)

The dog. So then, the next day, he’s got this huge barrel of dog toys – this included – and this, this printed flyer for this dog he got off of, like, Facebook or something. And he’s pleading with me, all, “Jeanie, if we don’t take this little guy home, they’re gonna put him down in a week. He’s ours. We gotta go get him.” And he’s looking at me so serious... And I believe him. So I say, “Okay, let’s go get the dog!” And we get in the car, and we’re on a *mission*, and we’re cruising through downtown.... When a tire blows out. We sort of pull over, and I get out to get to changing it – Because we’re on a mission, and we’ve gotta go save this good boy – And I’m on my knees changing out the tire, and I look over.... And Scott’s just sort of shut down. He’s all gray and cloudy, staring at me while I fix the car. Eventually, we get back in, and Scott says, “*Let’s just go home.*” And we did. And we never went.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

(a half-hearted, grim joke)

So Scott better be up there apologizing to that damn dog.

HARRY

He loved you. A lot.

JEAN

(with a grateful expression)

...You, too.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)
But he needed so much of me.

HARRY
Yeah.

JEAN
It's hard. To be needed.... All the time.

HARRY
Of course.

JEAN
To be needed... But then at the same time—

HARRY
—To know you're not what they need. Yeah.

They sit in silence with their thoughts, regrets.

JEAN
(slowly)
...It is kind of funny.

HARRY looks at her, confused.

JEAN (cont.)
(actually amused)
Did you know that my dad killed himself? In an office?

HARRY
(alarmed by her casualty)
What? No.... In an office?

JEAN nods.

JEAN
(stating facts)
Brought a gun to the office, killed himself at work.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)
He sold *life insurance*.

HARRY lightly chuckles, then clears his throat.

HARRY

(trying to snuff out the humor)

That's horrible. I'm so sorry.

JEAN shrugs, morbidly and nostalgically grinning a bit.

JEAN

He had... stuff going on.

Beat.

HARRY

My mom dropped dead when she was getting her will notarized.

JEAN snorts and immediately covers her mouth.

JEAN

I'm sorry.

HARRY waves it off.

HARRY

(trying to lighten the mood)

But hey. Look at us now!

JEAN

(smiling)

Look at us now!

JEAN and HARRY nod, smile, and look around the room for a moment.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

(starting to laugh)

I mean, Scott is *dead*, we're – we're *surrounded* in his blood and guts, basically –

She nods along herself and snorts.

JEAN (cont.)

(laughing in disbelief)

It's *the end of the world*, and.... like, what am I doing? I'm just sitting here!

HARRY slowly begins laughing along.

HARRY
(laughing)

We are just sitting here.

JEAN
(to HARRY, giggling in panic)

It's the end of the world!

HARRY
(laughter rising, turning to panic)
THE END OF THE WORLD – !

HARRY & JEAN
(finishing each other's sentences)
AND WE ARE JUST SITTING HERE!

*HARRY and JEAN continue laughing hysterically,
having finally lost their minds.*

They settle down.

Beat.

JEAN
(suddenly firm)

He's coming / back.

HARRY
(shakily)

/ He's...coming back.

*They look at each other, full of belief but not much
choice.*

*MARTY enters, jacket over his shoulder, sauntering
in like it's just another Monday. He is on the phone.*

MARTY
(mansplaining into his cell)

No, babe – No, I was busy cleaning up a little slime sitcha-ma-bitch.... No, not like that.... Babe – Babe – You're *overreacting*. You are acting *craaaazy*. Yes, the Rapture *is* happening, but I've got my best guy on it.

He looks at JEAN and HARRY, briefly takes the phone off his ear and points to it, like, “Bitches be crazy.”

He continues his conversation.

MARTY (cont.)
(into the phone)

Babe – Babes, everything is going to be fine, okay? It’s probably a li’l mis-comm-ootch, golden calf somewheres, women’s suffrage, sodomy here, sodomy there – it’s probably all the sodomy – And, uh, we’ll get it squared away. Just hang out in the sex bunker til I get home, ‘mkay? Kisses.

He hangs up and looks directly at the audience.

MARTY (cont.)
(smooth)

Sex bunker:

He holds eye contact for a beat too long before re-joining the metaverse.

He joins HARRY and JEAN in the cubicle.

MARTY (cont.)

Well, if it isn’t Dildo and Frodo. HA-HA.

Beat.

MARTY (cont.)

Don’t worry, Jean, you’re Frodo.

HARRY is visibly annoyed past all annoyance.

JEAN rolls her eyes.

MARTY (cont.)

So, uh, whatcha guys up to? Crying like a couple of iddy-widdy-widdle babies because your boyfriend and your ex-boyfriend brain-splooged on you?

JEAN and HARRY stiffen up, offended.

HARRY
(pissed, “obviously”)

... Yes.

JEAN

(hiding emotion with an emphasis on competency)

Marty, did you and Michael take care of Scott, like I asked?

MARTY

(“Am I stupid?”)

Uh, yeah, I took care of it.

JEAN

(relieved)

Oh, good.

HARRY swallows.

HARRY

(slowly)

Was it... Tasteful?

MARTY

Oh yeah, yup, super tasteful. Muy... taste.

JEAN nods to herself.

JEAN

(back to MARTY)

Respectful?

MARTY

(offended)

Lo-ho-ho-oads! Come on guys, this is *me* we're talking about.

JEAN and HARRY silently reassure themselves.

Beat.

HARRY

(somber)

Nothing else to do but wait.

JEAN

(a silver lining)

And work.

HARRY

Right. And work.

Somber beat.

MARTY breaks the silence.

MARTY

You guys are actually the biggest bummers I've ever met.

Beat.

MARTY (cont.)

(trying to rally the troops)

I mean, *c'mon*. It's the End of the World! Time to have a little *fun*! There are *zero consequences now*. We are all *under duress* so anything we say (or do) doesn't even stand in a court of law!

HARRY

I really don't think that's how that works.

MARTY

No, I'm being *serious*! We can do whatever, say whatever, and *tongue* ANYONE we WANT!

Beat.

He looks at JEAN.

JEAN

(threateningly)

The next thing you'll *tongue* is a workplace harassment report.

MARTY

(casual, quick retreat)

Whoaaa, calm down, Mommy Jeans, it's a... ya know, like a guy-joke. Like a joke between guys. A joke that guys make and tell each other and laugh about when in the company of other guys.

He elbows HARRY, hard.

MARTY (cont.)

Right, Harry?

HARRY winces, rubbing his side.

HARRY

(angry)

I wouldn't know, Marty.

MARTY
 (“Zing.”)

Yeah, you wouldn’t.

MARTY reaches over to the tarp behind him and high-fives a lump within.

MARTY (cont.)
(patting a lump within the tarp behind him, super casual)

Up top, Scotty.

Beat.

Oh my god.

HARRY and JEAN slowly turn to MARTY, horror and disgust on their faces.

MARTY stares back, unfazed.

MARTY (cont.)

What’s the matter with you guys?

JEAN approaches MARTY slowly.

JEAN
(seething)

Marty. *Please* tell me you didn’t just do what I thought you did.

MARTY
(confused)

What? *A high-five?*

JEAN is in his face.

JEAN
(furious)

Martin Lincoln. Tell me Scott is not under there.

MARTY
(scared)

I – uh – um – not really... N-Not in the way... He was...

JEAN grabs him by his shirt.

JEAN

(a terrifying thing to behold)

Marty, did you throw a *tarp* over Scott's *corpse*, call it a *burial*, and then come to me and tell me you "*took care of it*"?

Beat.

MARTY knows his life depends on his answer. He breaks free of her grip and backs away from the both of them, defensive, motioning for everyone to calm down. He takes a deep breath, and in his most serious, committed tone:

MARTY

(wagging a finger)

– The NICEST tarp money can buy!

Before he can finish his lame defense, HARRY whips the tarp off of the corner of the office.

SCOTT – with a pronounced, gory bullethole on the side of his head, blood, guts, and brain matter spewed all over the cubicle wall, his eyes wide and blank, his tongue hanging purple and swollen out of his mouth, his skin pale, and his skull agape – sits lifeless upon an office chair.

There is no Gun in sight.

JEAN and HARRY shriek in horror.

MARTY scratches his head.

JEAN

(trying to keep from vomiting)

Oh my GOD – !

MARTY

– Yep.

HARRY

Holy – FUCK – !

MARTY

– Guys, it's *just* a dead body.

JEAN
(emphatically)

NO, Marty, it's SCOTT. *Our* SCOTT.

HARRY
(disgusted, horrified)

How could you let him sit like this?!

MARTY
(mumbling)

He was *heavy*. And *wet*.

JEAN
(a realization)

WAIT – where's the gun?

JEAN begins frantically looking around on the floor. HARRY joins her.

MARTY

How would I know?!

JEAN locks eyes with MARTY, sure that he's guilty.

HARRY

Marty, this isn't a fucking *joke*.

JEAN
(feral)

WHERE IS IT?

MARTY
(making no attempt to search)

I don't know! I stuck it– somewhere around here– !

HARRY and JEAN search some more. They come up empty.

JEAN balls her fists up towards MARTY, growls, and backs away. She accidentally looks at SCOTT and tears her eyes away. She goes to run away. She stops. She looks back. She nearly vomits once more. Finally, she faces MARTY, unhinged and furious.

JEAN
(*violent*)

YOU'RE going to clean this up. And you're going to give him a PROPER burial. With FLOWERS. And a HEADSTONE or a PLAQUE or a SIGN. And you're going to make it really fucking NICE. And I don't care how LONG it takes you. I don't care if the EARTH opens up and SWALLOWS you. And you're GOING TO FIND THAT GUN. You *DON'T STOP UNTIL IT'S DONE AND IT'S DONE WELL* – DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?

MARTY
(*white*)

Yes, ma'am.

JEAN proceeds to storm out of the room – but doubles back and sticks a finger out at HARRY.

JEAN
(*still screaming*)

AND YOU'RE GONNA HELP HIM.

HARRY
(*confused and scared*)

Me?!

JEAN turns to go.

HARRY (cont.)
(*looking about the room, horrified*)

But we don't have shovels or tools or – !

JEAN
(*with nausea-infused intensity*)

Harry...

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

I don't give a flying fuck.

She turns to go one last time, catches sight of SCOTT's corpse, doubles over, and sprints offstage.

A moment of silence as HARRY and MARTY let the presence – and odors – of SCOTT's decrepit cadaver wash over them.

Woof.
MARTY

Beat.

Must be that time of the month.
MARTY (cont.)

HARRY, shaking with anger, turns to MARTY.

HARRY
(*seething*)
Marty... What the *fuck* is wrong with you?

MARTY truly considers this.

He turns to the audience.

MARTY
(*deadly serious, speaking to the ether*)
I lost my brother, my father, and two uncles in 9/11, thus forcing me to confront human mortality on a personal and massive scale at a tender age as well as permanently severing my ability to emotionally connect with other men.

He turns back to HARRY and shrugs.

MARTY (cont.)
(*douche*)
Bitches, man.

HARRY sighs and lets out a muffled howl of frustration. He rubs his temples.

HARRY
Let's just... *Take care of this...* And then never, ever speak to each other again. Okay?

MARTY
'Mkay, Cap'n.

HARRY and MARTY approach SCOTT's body hesitantly, unsure of how to manually accomplish this.

HARRY
(*studying a few different angles*)
Uhh... Um...

He looks at MARTY.

HARRY (cont.)

I take his right, you take his left?

MARTY nods.

They go on either side of SCOTT and try to place his arms around their necks, standing up with him. They grunt with the effort and soon realize the limited mobility this position allows them.

MARTY
(grunting)

Nope, no, that's a no.

They drop SCOTT back in his chair and examine his position once more.

HARRY

Okay... I take the feet, you take the head?

MARTY
(repulsed by the idea)

Fuck no, I'll take the feet, you take the head.

HARRY looks at his friend's cracked skull and exposed brain tissue. He swallows.

HARRY

Fine.

They assume their positions and, with much effort, move SCOTT's ragdoll-like body off of the office chair and, slowly, downstage.

[During the journey downstage, there is room for much improvisation depending on the physicality of the actor playing SCOTT, as well as the abilities of HARRY and MARTY, i.e. "Watch the head! ...The HEAD!" or "He's slipping – ! Grab his butt!" "What?!" "His ASS, grab his ASS!" etc.]

The pair make their way downstage.

MARTY
(*exhausted*)

Harry, where are we even going?

MARTY's grip on SCOTT slips, and the body clatters to the floor.

HARRY
(*appalled*)

MARTY!

HARRY goes to lift SCOTT himself, but he is unable.

HARRY (cont.)

Fucking help me!

MARTY folds his arms.

MARTY
(*a relationship they don't have*)

Nuh-uh. Not until you tell me what's going on.

HARRY
(*flabbergasted*)

What?

MARTY

You've been in a pissy mood since I got here.

HARRY stops trying to grapple with SCOTT for a second to face MARTY.

HARRY
(*not believing what he's hearing*)

Are you serious? ...*MY BEST FRIEND IS DEAD.*

Beat.

MARTY
(*matching HARRY's "duh" tone*)

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOUR BEST FRIEND IS!

HARRY clenches his fists and pivots, trying not to add to the day's body count.

HARRY

(done)

JUST – just help me get him back in the chair.

MARTY

OKAY, geez.

They resume their positions and go back the way they came.

MARTY

(carrying SCOTT)

What was your plan before anyway – ?

HARRY

I don't know, okay?

Approaching the chair, they attempt to get SCOTT into a sitting position. He slips – and they catch him. He slips again, the other way – and they catch him –

[Any potential smirking/breaking of SCOTT can be written off as “rigor mortis.” etc., you guys are smart.]

They finally get SCOTT back sitting upright in the chair. Both are panting, exhausted from the effort.

Beat.

Beat.

MARTY

How come we never hang out, man?

HARRY

(way more out of breath than his companion)

What... Do you... Mean... Marty?

MARTY

Like, we've been working in the same office for *seven years*, dude. And I feel like I've been pretty friendly, considering, but – I mean, man – Sometimes I almost get the feeling – I almost get the feeling you don't *like me* or something.

HARRY
(breathy sarcasm)

Wow – That’s weird –

MARTY
 And look at us now! Trying to get rid of our coworker’s dead body, having a few laughs, some light ribbing – it’s like we’ve been doing this all our lives!

Uh-huh.
 HARRY

HARRY braces himself to catch his breath.

MARTY
 It’s like in that movie.

HARRY sighs.

MARTY (cont.)
(quickly, with proper French pronunciation)
 The one starring Andrew McCarthy and Jonathan Silverman, directed by Ted Kotcheff, with cinematography by Francois Protat?

Mm-hmm.
 HARRY

MARTY
(still on it)
 The one where they’re like, “Bernie’s dead.”

Right.
 HARRY

MARTY
(confusing himself)
 And it was the weekend...

HARRY, having caught his breath, has now lost his patience.

HARRY
 Thanks, Marty, that was *really* insightful–

MARTY
(cutting him off, genuinely)
 No problemo, mi amigo.

HARRY

(pissed off, maybe a little emotional)

– But can we do this on a day when we're *not* burying my best friend?

MARTY, confused for a moment, looks at HARRY, then looks at SCOTT, then HARRY again.

It finally clicks.

MARTY

...SCOTT'S YOUR BEST FRIEND.

Beat.

MARTY (cont.)

(placing a hand on HARRY's shoulder)

I'm sorry for your loss, bro.

HARRY shrugs his hand off.

HARRY

(back to business, a little sarcastic)

Thanks, Marty. Now, I need some rope.

MARTY

Harry, it's really not cool to joke about suicide.

MARTY gives the audience a knowing glance.

HARRY looks at him, confused.

HARRY

What are you doing? *C'mon.*

HARRY ushers MARTY offstage in search of rope.

Beat.

For a moment, all that exists onstage is SCOTT's lifeless body.

He slides forward a little... and out of the folds of the tarp, comes the Gun, clattering to the ground.

MICHAEL enters, casually and obliviously, coffee mug in hand.

MICHAEL

(looking about the office)

Jeez. It's getting a little visceral around here.

He notices SCOTT slumped over in the office chair.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(happy to see him)

Ah, Scott! Back already, I see! Good man!

SCOTT says nothing.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(oblivious)

How is the Almighty? Healthy? Nice jawline?

SCOTT says nothing.

His body sinks ever-so-slightly in his chair.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(chuckling)

Ho-ho, a Case of the Mondays! Don't I know it!

SCOTT says nothing.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Well, I'll just let you work then, much to write about I'm sure – *ah!*

MICHAEL notices the Gun and picks it up off of SCOTT's lap.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(with childlike fascination)

You were able to keep the firearm! Oh, goody! What luck! And what a nice specimen it is!

He fidgets with it in admiration.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(with oblivious joviality)

I don't know *anything* about guns!

SCOTT says nothing.

Suddenly, actual rigor mortis sets in and jolts SCOTT's arm forward in an abrupt motion towards MICHAEL.

Beat.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(disbelief in his good luck)

Really? I can keep it?

Beat.

SCOTT's corpse jolts again, repeating the motion. The force of it shifts his body even further down the chair.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Why, thank you, Mr. Butler! And might I say, you're the finest employee we have here at, erm, at this establishment!

SCOTT's entire body violently convulses.

MICHAEL chuckles.

Ha-ha! *Indeed!*

MICHAEL (cont.)

MICHAEL does a silly gun dance as way of thanks.

Enter HARRY, with rope, and MARTY, with chips. They immediately notice MICHAEL.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(referring to SCOTT)

Ah, hello, boys! Look who's back!

HARRY approaches MICHAEL concernedly.

HARRY
(respectful to a fault)

Uhhh, Michael – Sir –

MARTY
(mouth full)

Scott's still dead.

MICHAEL inquisitively looks back down at the corpse, extends his arm, and pushes the deceased SCOTT BUTLER right off the office chair.

MICHAEL

Ah. So it seems.

HARRY bends down to retrieve SCOTT but notices the Gun in MICHAEL's hands.

HARRY

(shocked)

Where did you get that?

MICHAEL

(as-a-matter-of-fact)

Oh! Scott gave it to me. I'm going to give it to one of my children. Children love guns.

HARRY rips it out of MICHAEL's hands to inspect. He looks sad. MARTY goes to comfort him.

MARTY

(mouth still full)

No one in this office knows shit-fuck about sharing.

HARRY

(to himself)

Gosh, I... I don't know what to do with it now.

MARTY

(mouth full)

We could do like they do in *Bad Boys 2*, y'know. Pow-pow.

MICHAEL

Yes! Very good, Martin! Let's have a "Yes-Fest"! There are *no* bad ideas!

HARRY

Well, I just heard two, so *no*, we're not going to do that.

HARRY stops, thinking.

MICHAEL and MARTY look at each other.

MICHAEL

(like a middle schooler)

Booooo!

MARTY
(*joining in*)

BOOOOO, HARRY!

MICHAEL

There are no *no's* in the Yes-Fest!

MARTY

Yeahhh, Harry!

They continue to boo HARRY for a bit.

HARRY
(*irritated*)

Can you two please *shut the fuck up* for *one minute*?

MARTY
(*overlapping MICHAEL's continued boos*)

Hey, Harry, sorry, but Michael's my new best friend. I don't wanna be yours anymore. All your best friends kill themselves.

MICHAEL looks to his subordinates, checking to see if anyone has beat him to his idea.

MICHAEL
(*suddenly a general*)

Hypothetical question! *What do we do to a dead body?* How do we view it? How do we love a dead body? If you were a dead body, what would you want? If I were Mr. Butler and I were coming back, I would want the first thing I see to be my body venerated for the martyr I am! Isn't that every man's dream? To wake up in my velvet casket, embalmed, my eyes and my mouth sewn shut, my chest stuffed with arsenic and sawdust, to listen to all who ever loved me, weeping and mourning six feet above my grave?

He looks down at SCOTT.

Beat.

MICHAEL gesticulates.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(*memory of a goldfish, bemusedly outraged*)

What is he doing on the floor??

HARRY and MARTY scramble to lift SCOTT up and back onto the chair.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(pacing militarily)

But we must prepare for all possible outcomes! We must see to it that Scott's body is properly respected should he return – but also properly disposed of should he fail to –

HARRY

Sir –

MICHAEL

I don't want to hear it, Harry. You may have hated the man, but he was a beloved friend to us all.

HARRY
(giving up)

(Sure.)

MARTY looks for a place to throw away his chip bag but can't, and so he just shoves the empty bag onto SCOTT's lap. He grabs the tarp and drapes it over SCOTT's body. Then, HARRY takes the rope and ties it around SCOTT to secure the tarp. He looks like a grotesque Christmas tree.

They stop to admire their work.

MARTY

Hey, Harry, maybe if writing doesn't work out–

HARRY

Shut up, Marty.

JEAN enters.

MICHAEL

(“what a pleasant surprise”)

Oh, good! Jean's here! Jeanie, we need a lighter, a bow and arrow, and gasoline.

JEAN approaches the office chair/funeral pyre with horror.

JEAN
(appalled)

Hang on – is that Scott??

MICHAEL gives up on JEAN and goes offstage in search of his supplies.

MARTY begins to dig around SCOTT's desk.

MARTY
(*searching*)

Yep.

MARTY finds a lighter.

HARRY
(*to MICHAEL*)

Wait – we are not *burning* Scott's body!

MARTY

It's not like he needs it.

HARRY
(*panic rising, spelling it out for them*)

But he does! For when he *gets back!*

MARTY

If he gets back.

HARRY

He will!!

MICHAEL
(*yelling from offstage*)

....BUT *PROBABLY* NOT!

MARTY lights up.

JEAN
(*catching up, pointing at the Gun on the desk*)

Is that the *GUN*?

HARRY

No one is *listening* to me!

MICHAEL re-enters, carrying a huge tank of gasoline in his arms, very casually.

MICHAEL
(*to HARRY, entering*)

Harry, my dear boy, we *just* said we were going to give him the burial of a martyr! Of a true, viking warrior! I know if I was Scott, I would be *flattered* by this send off!

HARRY

(flustered, running up to MICHAEL and MARTY alternatively)

NO! I mean, *Michael* – what about the – the – pine – um – velvet box – and the arsenic and the sawdust and the – *burial* part of a burial, the one that you were just – just *TALKING* about – !

MICHAEL begins splashing gasoline onto SCOTT's tarped body.

JEAN

(begging MICHAEL)

MICHAEL! DO NOT DO THIS!

MARTY approaches with the lighter.

HARRY goes around him and physically restrains him from getting any closer. MARTY fights to break free of HARRY's grip.

MARTY

(struggling)

HARRY! GAH – we gotta – c'mon – !

JEAN desperately jumps onto SCOTT's desk and waves her arms.

JEAN

THE EULOGIES! THE EULOGIES, MICHAEL!

Everyone freezes and looks at JEAN.

JEAN, out of breath, is momentarily surprised by all the attention.

JEAN (cont.)

(panting)

It's.... Not a... *Proper* funeral... Without... Eulogies.

MICHAEL considers this. He looks at MARTY and shrugs.

MICHAEL

Well, I suppose Jeanie does make a good point. And who knows? If Scott does fail, and the Good God Above smites us all, maybe he'll smite us slightly *less* if we say a ton of nice things about our fallen comrade in our final moments....

HARRY helps JEAN down from the desk.

MICHAEL (cont.)

...For he sees all, and can do all! The Lord is, truly, impotent.

MICHAEL, pretty proud of himself, nods to conclude his speech. He looks up, checking to see if God heard him.

Beat.

HARRY

...Sorry?

MICHAEL
(just as confident)

Impotent! ...*He is all-powerful!*

No one has the heart, or the energy, to correct him.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(looking from person to person)

Alright. Who wants to go first?

Beat.

MARTY

I'll go.

MARTY clears his throat and steps up.

MARTY (cont.)
(solemnly)

Scott Butler, you were a writer at *The Columbus Post*.

Beat.

MARTY steps back.

HARRY

What, that's it?

JEAN

That's *all* you're gonna say?

MARTY
(offended)

Sorry I was the *only* person in the office *not* sleeping with the guy.

MICHAEL

(chuckling)

Ha-ha, true! And that's why we called him, "Whore Scott."

MARTY laughs along with him. JEAN is not in the mood.

JEAN

Michael, no one called him that.

MICHAEL

(miming an aside but speaking to the whole group)

(And that's why we call her, "Wrong Jean.")

MARTY and MICHAEL burst into laughter. After a moment, HARRY puts an end to it.

HARRY

(fed up)

Okay, *STOP IT*. I'll go.

HARRY clears his throat and straightens his tie, while the other boys settle down.

He takes a deep breath.

HARRY (cont.)

(easing into sincerity)

Scott... You were my best friend, practically my brother. You were also the best writer I've ever had the pleasure of working with...

He gets choked up.

HARRY (cont.)

Sorry.

He clears his throat.

HARRY (cont.)

Seeing you like this, being here right now, it's hard to not have regrets—

MICHAEL zooms in, shaking his head and applauding slowly and sarcastically.

MICHAEL

Harry, FANTASTIC job— !

He moves a confused and distraught HARRY aside.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(really selling the twist, ceasing applause)

– *DEPRESSING* everyone into a coma! Now, if you don't mind, *this* is how you euthanize...

He assumes HARRY's position, loosens his tie, and clears his throat.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(like Cleon to the Athenians)

Who was Scott? In life? Kind of...short? Kind of stocky, in certain lighting, but slender in others? Great calves? How will we remember him? As a man? As an...employee? How about as an ex-boyfriend whose failed relationship cast his final days in a pitiful shadow? Who knows! ...Did we have warm feelings for this man? Luke-warm feelings? ...Room-temperature feelings? Hour 2 in the tub kind-of-feelings, or baby-bath-in-the-sink toasty? I, for one, will not remember him for who he was in life, but instead, for who he is in death!

He takes a second to look at the mound that is SCOTT.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(poetry in the mundane)

...Bluish? And tied-up? And of course, on *wheels*. ...Okay. *Praise be to God!*

At the moment he utters these words, there is a big BOOM! The room shakes for a moment, then stops.

Beat.

The employees look around anticipating further clamors.

All is quiet.

MARTY

(cutting through the silence, high-fiving MICHAEL)

Nice one, Boss-Man.

MICHAEL

Alright, Jeanie! You're up!

JEAN sighs and shrugs.

JEAN

Okay, sure.

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)
(awkward at first)

Uh... Scott, you are...*dead*. And I'm sorry that you...are. Um. You know I'm no good at funerals, never have been, but yours is a close-tie for my least favorite. Not because of anything *you did*, but because of the subsequent insinuation that... You are gone. And this could be it. And that is...sad.

MICHAEL
(in a loud whisper, to MARTY)
(Is there a fast-forward button, or-?)

HARRY shushes them.

Somewhere, distant rumbling...

JEAN
(with increasing emotional panic)
 And that would mean there's no going back and changing *anything*, or *fixing* hurt, or I don't know, just getting to sit with you and watch TV one more time, or come by and bother you in your cubicle for no reason at all, and I know this is a *really bad* eulogy and the *only reason* I suggested it at all is because I didn't want you to get barbequed, but – *God*, Scott, you are such an *asshole* and a *pain in my ass* since the day I met you, but I can't tell you how badly I need you back. Here. How much *we* – Fuck. I guess, if there's saying anything, it's just that I *love* y– !

BOOOOOOOM!

JEAN is abruptly cut off by the violent shaking of the entire office, accompanied by the dimming of lights and the swaying of fixtures.

Everyone clutches onto furniture and cubicle walls.

There is a constant stream of clattering, screaming, and earth-shaking emitting from the outside world.

The lights start going on and off. Everything is in chaos.

JEAN (cont.)
(overlapping yelling)

OH MY / GOD–!

MARTY

(overlapping panic)

/ I THINK I JUST CREAMED MY JEANS—!

JEAN

EW, MARTY, / GOD—!

MARTY

/ WAS THAT A FUCKING METEOR—?

HARRY

Is everyone okay, is everyone accounted for?

MICHAEL makes his way to the front of the group, his combover having suffered severe damage in the blast.

MICHAEL

(trying to maintain oblivious control over the group amid further tremors)

Well, folks – CLEARLY, Scott has failed us! And it is time to FIGHT BACK!

BOOOOOOM!

HARRY

Michael, *what the fuck are you saying??*

MICHAEL

(increasing volume over the booming)

I'm SAYING— that GOD is now our ENEMY! He has turned his back on this world, and it is now US against HIM!

MARTY is clutching onto the cubicle wall, sobbing.

MARTY

(crying like a baby)

I don't want to die!

HARRY

(trying to be heard over the apocalypse)

NO, MICHAEL, THAT IS A TERRIBLE IDEA— !

MICHAEL

(to HARRY)

THERE ARE NO NO'S IN THE YES-FEST, HARRY! FROM HERE ON OUT, THE FIRST RULE OF THE APOCALYPSE – IS YES AND!

With a great battle cry, MICHAEL runs offstage.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

More lights flicker, the entire building is shaking like a chihuahua.

JEAN
(to the OTHERS)

WHAT IS HE DOING *NOW*?

MICHAEL returns, his arms full of weapons of all kinds – various guns, slingshots, maces, nunchucks, spears, a violin –

He begins passing them out to his employees.

MICHAEL
(distributing the weapons)

HERE! Now, everyone arm themselves with an appropriate weapon – YES, good, VERY GOOD – The Lord Above is now our enemy! *MEN – JEAN – **PREPARE TO FIGHT GOD!***

MICHAEL himself brandishes a swinging mace. He readies himself, throwing the mace around threateningly at the sky.

JEAN
(clutching a weapon much too large for her)

MICHAEL, THIS IS MADNESS!

Suddenly, MARTY gets a call on his cell phone. He looks at his coworkers, confused, and brings the phone up to his ear.

MARTY
(sniffing)

Uh... Your Holiness?!

Beat.

MARTY (cont.)
(normal)

Yeah, this is Marty.

MICHAEL pushes towards MARTY and snatches the phone from his hands.

BOOOOOOOM!

MICHAEL

...What do you mean, “*what happened?*” ...*YOUR GOD IS A VENGEFUL, BACKSTABBING BITCH, THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED!*

MICHAEL hangs up the phone and thrusts it back at MARTY.

HARRY

(clinging onto civility)

MICHAEL! Maybe this is just Scott! Maybe God isn’t trying to KILL US!

BOOOOOOOOOM!

MICHAEL brandishes a swinging mace.

MICHAEL

(to HARRY)

You make a good point, Harry! And thusly, we must play the field equally!

With another great BOOOOOOOM!, MARTY accidentally bumps into SCOTT’s tarped funeral pyre, and rolls him a few feet, catching MICHAEL’s attention.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(kissing ass by shouting selected phrases towards the heavens)

Ah, yes! SCOTT! Everyone – DESECRATE HIS GRAVE! On the off-chance this is ALL *HIS FAULT*, we have to show the Almighty that we are *NOT WITH HIM!*

MARTY, still crying, immediately begins throwing garbage on SCOTT, wheeling him around, drawing on the tarp, etc.

MICHAEL joins in.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(throwing garbage)

BOOOOO! BOOOOO, SCOTT!

MARTY

(spitting on SCOTT)

BOOOOOOOOOOO!

MICHAEL
(adding to the spit)

NOT INVOLVED! /

MARTY
(it's too much spit)

/ WE ARE NOT INVOLVED WITH HIM!

In the middle of all of this, JEAN finds HARRY, both limply holding their absurd weaponry.

JEAN
(devastated, confused)

It didn't work. *None of it worked!*

HARRY

We don't know that yet. Have faith.

JEAN

What are you *talking* about?

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

This one knocks everyone to the floor, the lights are flickering, the room is SHAKING – !

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM! The lights flicker– !

MICHAEL gets up to his feet– !

MICHAEL
(truly a general)

THIS IS THE LAST STAND, MEN (AND JEAN)! TRY TO GET A HIT IN!

He throws his mace as high as he can possibly get it, and it clatters pitifully to the ground.

Undeterred, he grabs another weapon from the pile.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(encouraging the OTHERS)

Well, come on!

Desperately, one by one, they all join in, throwing weapons as high as they can and watching them all fall to the ground one by one until everything in the pile is gone.

Then, the lights, pulsating with increasing intensity, flicker and flicker and flutter and flash, as we catch glimpses, small moments of movement onstage–

They pulse and whir and spit and sputter, UNTIL–

SCOTT (!) THROWS OFF HIS TARPED CAGE, STANDS ATOP HIS FUNERAL PYRE, AND LIKE A WILD ANIMAL RELEASED FROM HIS MORTAL CAGE, SCREECHES:

SCOTT

(animalistic)

GAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!

SCOTT, very much alive, stands above the OTHERS, heaving. He's just as bloodied and brain matter-lacking as before, but he's got a wild and maddened glint to his eyes, as though he has stared into infinity, challenged it to a dick-measuring contest, and won on the basis of presentation. This is a man with nothing else to lose, whose fear has died, crucified, and was buried – and now – in the third hour – has risen again.

Beat.

Beat.

SCOTT, remaining standing and breathing heavy, surveys the landscape around him.

The office is a bit of a disaster. Papers and posters are scattered everywhere on the floor; and one of the pillars has fallen in the quaking.

JEAN, HARRY, MARTY, and MICHAEL look upwards at him, mouths agape.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

(with a small wave)

Hey, guys.

Beat. No one has any idea what to say.

MICHAEL broaches first.

MICHAEL

Heyyyy-yyy! Guys, Scott's back! Just as we predicted!

He goes for a little pat-pat hug, but stops.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(light ribbing disguising cosmic concern)

HA— Assuming you really *are* Scott and not merely a meat vessel for an ancient deity, ho-ho?

SCOTT

(an air of jet-lag and overt self-consciousness)

No, uh, it's really me. At least I'm pretty sure.

He makes eye contact with HARRY and JEAN, and they go to him for an emotional group hug—

But MARTY intercepts, and clutching SCOTT's legs, says sincerely:

MARTY

(mid-hug, emotional)

Really glad I didn't light you on fire, man.

SCOTT

(begrudgingly allowing the hug)

Um... Thanks, Marty.

MARTY pulls away and flashes finger guns.

MARTY

(manic laughter)

(I was VERY close to...)

SCOTT gets down from the chair and faces HARRY and JEAN.

SCOTT

(emotional, almost in disbelief)

Hey.

JEAN

(in shock)

...Hi.

Beat.

The three friends fall into a hug. SCOTT clutches them both, facing out, tears in his eyes.

HARRY

(emotional, mid-embrace)

It's— It's good to have you back, buddy.

SCOTT

(hugging)

It's good to be back.

They part, with JEAN lingering for just a second longer. She looks intensely at SCOTT's face, and with emotions swirling, almost begins to speak— But instead clears her throat and picks a piece of brain off of SCOTT's hair.

JEAN

(awkward, hiding the emotional with the sensory)

Erm— uh, you've got a little— of your— your whole skull, actually— is just sorta— hanging—

She throws the piece offstage.

JEAN (cont.)

...Got it.

Beat.

The room is off— somber, confused, with a million questions and literally not enough pages to answer them all.

MICHAEL

Well, goodness! *Someone tell a joke!*

No one tells a joke.

MICHAEL (cont.)

(gesticulating with the Gun still in his hands)

Scott has returned to us! I would praise Jesus if he hadn't just tried to kill us moments ago!
Ha-ha!

SCOTT, noticing the Gun, suddenly becomes very alert.

SCOTT
(concerned)

Why is Michael holding the gun?

MICHAEL
(offended)

You gave it to me, Scotty! Goodness, it's like our conversations go in one ear and out the other!

MARTY
(mumbling to MICHAEL)

(You mean, through one temple and out the other.)

He mimes SCOTT shooting himself, as MICHAEL bursts into thunderous laughter.

MICHAEL
(making an example of him)

Now, *there!* Now *that* is a good joke!

SCOTT takes the Gun from MICHAEL's hands.

MARTY
(with frat boy, gory enthusiasm)

BRO, TELL US WHAT *HAPPENED!*

MICHAEL
Yes, Scott! Tell us before you tell our tens of dutiful subscribers!

SCOTT
(embarrassed, unsure of where to begin)

Guys... I—

MICHAEL

Did you save the world? /

MARTY

What did God look like? /

MICHAEL

Are we all going to die? /

MARTY

Was he tall? /

MICHAEL
If you had to break up the percentages of, say, the likelihood of dying-to-living? /

Taller than me? /

MARTY

GUYS!

SCOTT
(overwhelmed)

MARTY and MICHAEL shut up.

SCOTT (cont.)
(spitting it out, angry and embarrassed)
God and I... *broke up*. Okay?

Beat.

MARTY and MICHAEL look at each other.... And then burst into hysterical laughter.

MARTY
(so confused, but so delighted)
BRO- WHAT?

MICHAEL
(in the throes of laughter)
OH, SCOTT!

SCOTT sighs deeply. He scoots up onto the desk into a comfortable sitting position. He fidgets with the Gun, thinking.

JEAN, momentarily and selfishly concerned this all links back to her somehow, tries to avoid the discussion.

JEAN
(interjecting, a defense)
Scott, we don't have to get into all of this now. We should call a doctor, you've been dead for hours –

SCOTT
(catching something)
Hours?

JEAN
(eyes darting, confused, nervous)
Yes?

SCOTT is lost in thought for a moment.

JEAN

....Scott?

SCOTT looks up at her. He inhales.

SCOTT

(still sort of lost in it all, rubbing his temples)

No doctors. No calling anyone. Just... Look, under the desk. It's our stuff.

JEAN

(confused)

Our stuff...?

SCOTT

Well— *Earth's* stuff. Look.

He gestures to the space under his desk.

JEAN takes a peek and, alarmed, pulls out a cardboard box with the same gold lettering as the box in the previous act— marked, "PLANET EARTH".

JEAN sets it down on the desk and begins revealing the contents: a moldy, half-eaten apple, a bloodied crown of thorns, a photo album, old strips of papyrus, Bambi II on Blu-ray, and a bra.

HARRY joins her in the examination.

JEAN

(disgusted, holding Eve's apple)

Don't know why, but God never struck me as the sentimental-hoarder-type.

MARTY, curious, joins in and holds up the bra.

MARTY

(genuine disappointment)

Awww, Earth's an A-cup?

HARRY, ignoring him, sorts through the pieces of papyrus.

HARRY

And these are...?

SCOTT

(sighing)

I don't know, books of the bible we'll never get, I guess.

MARTY

(reading over HARRY's shoulder)

It was all the Jews' fault. Huh.

MARTY is inspecting the Bambi II disc when JEAN interjects and begins returning objects to their proper placement.

JEAN

(collecting items from the boys)

So— Wait. *God* called you up there to *break up* with Earth? Why you? Why not— the Pope, or the President, or—?

MICHAEL

Perhaps Scott is the most break-uppable human being ever created!

MARTY

(first like a frat boy, then clearly to twist the knife)

TWO-IN-ONEEEE! ...Two in one week, you— you were dumped twice in a single week.

MICHAEL

Hear, hear!

MARTY

(running away with the joke)

MAN, seems like EVERYONE is just DUMPING SCOTT lately!

JEAN, in an uncharacteristic and swift move, knees MARTY in the privates. He squeaks and falls to the floor.

She looks at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL protectively cups himself.

JEAN turns back to SCOTT and motions him to continue.

SCOTT

(very serious, but doing a silly voice for God)

Uhh... All he said was I offered a “unique perspective”. Something to do with “having both known me and let me go”...

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

(quietly, looking at the OTHERS)

Well, that’s just what he sounded like.

JEAN

(aggravated that her reporting is going nowhere)

Ookay... But... I’m sorry, I still don’t understand.

SCOTT sighs and turns to HARRY.

SCOTT

Harry, type for me?

HARRY is caught off-guard.

HARRY

Sure, sure. Of course.

HARRY sits at SCOTT’s desk and powers up the computer. SCOTT remains seated on the desktop, facing outward.

HARRY (cont.)

(to the group, absentmindedly)

Internet’s back on, guys... *Miracle...*

HARRY gets to work.

The remainder of his coworkers sort of look at each other, like, “Can we be here?” and begin to shuffle out of the cubicle.

SCOTT

(to the rest of the group, tired)

You guys can stay if you wa–

MARTY

(fist-pumping)

Hell yeah.

JEAN backs away for a moment, as if she's still going to leave the cubicle space, but she very quickly teeters and faces back towards SCOTT.

SCOTT
(intense)

You want your story, Michael? Well, alright. Here you go. But keep in mind what I had to do to get it. The shit I put myself through. The amount of brain matter I *lost* in the process. I went where every man before me has gone, and I did what none of those men could ever do— *I came back*. And I was fighting by the skin of my teeth the whole time. This time, I want you to publish it alongside a *disclaimer*, so the *whole world* knows who their fucking savior is. This time, when I write this shit, *I don't wanna see a single fucking complaint*. Not after what I went through. Not after I *saved the world*.

Mesmerized, the OTHERS get comfortable.

SCOTT braces himself and begins darkly recounting the story of his time in the afterlife, Gun in hand:

SCOTT (cont.)
(a war story)

First thing I noticed when I woke up— was that I'd shit myself. I'd heard that you shit yourself when you die, but I guess I'd always thought that was on the earthly side of things, but no. Standing here before you all, I can confirm I've got double-shit.

MICHAEL
(to MARTY)

(Well, we've certainly hit the ground running!)

SCOTT
(continuing)

And my head... Didn't even hurt. Which... Was something I was worried about. I mean, I had gotten there fine, but I didn't want to walk around with just, like, a skull-splitting migraine all the time. So anyway, that was good. But, anyway, I wake up, and get this— *We're in my apartment*. Yeah, seriously. *My* apartment. *Exactly* like I left it. And I'm sitting at my dining room table. And there's this really nice dinner set up, lobster creme fresh mac-n-cheese — *my favorite*. And fancy. Real fancy. Red wine. Chianti Superiore. So I'm thinking, I'm getting wined and dined in the place where I'm most comfortable, right? And suddenly, in walks God. Yeah. *The God*. And I just know it's him. And he looks sort of like—

MARTY
(raising his hand, interjecting)

Oooo! He's HOT! A sexy, Lady-God! With big boobies!

SCOTT

(trying to address him quickly and move on)

Uh... No. No, not like that. He–

MICHAEL

(interjecting energetically)

– Looks like you! Ah-ha! A *clone* situation!

SCOTT

No, no. He’s, uh, got a big, white, bushy beard. Old guy. Kind eyes. Kind of your typical God. Sort of a Morgan Freeman-type, I was gonna say.

MICHAEL and MARTY are clearly very disappointed.

SCOTT (cont.)

Fine. Sure. It literally doesn’t affect the story, so, sure. He’s a – clone *me* – uh, with boobies. Sure.

The men celebrate for a second before a concerned-looking MARTY actually considers the picture presented to him – but then is surprised to realize it’s not that bad.

SCOTT (cont.)

(using his goofy God voice when appropriate)

Anyway, God sits me down, introduces himself as God, thanks me for coming, offers me dinner, which I thought was weird because it’s *my* house, like I should be offering *him* dinner, right? He’s got smooth jazz playing – “If You’re Ever in My Arms Again,” Peabo Bryson, 1984 – you know... And he tells me, “I’m sure you’ve noticed the world is ending.” And I tell him, yeah, I have, I got his package... And he thanked me for doing what I did, and I remember I said, “Yeah, no problem,” you know... And he looks me in the eye, all small-talk aside, dead-serious, and tells me straight-up: the world is ending because he’s breaking up with Earth, and he wants to send me back to tell everyone no hard feelings, especially the Pope, who’s probably gonna take it pretty hard, and – well, really so that *we* don’t waste our time anymore, with the prayers and such, which I thought was considerate – So... It’s not us, it’s him, it’s been a long run, but he’s just ready to move on. So.

This storytelling device isn’t working. Everyone just sort of stares back at him, blankly blinking.

SCOTT (cont.)

Um... So let’s say, sorry, it *is* a lot... Let’s say, *Marty*. You’re God. Come here.

MARTY, excited to participate, goes over to SCOTT.

SCOTT (cont.)

Now, break up with me.

MARTY

(miscellaneous female voice, faking crying)

Scott, we haven't made love in a year! I am so horny, like, / alllllllll of the time! Your –

SCOTT

(trying to end it)

Okay, no. Do it like I / said.

MARTY

(whiney)

/ – *erectile disfunction* isn't your *fault*, like, *you* are not your *disease*, but *fuck*, I mean, I have *needs*. As a *WOMAN*.

SCOTT

No, no, it wasn't like that. Someone else. Please. Just–

MICHAEL

(standing, chuckling)

Don't you worry, Scott. I seem to have a firm grasp on the plot.

SCOTT

(“Why not?”)

Uh, sure. Good.

MICHAEL stands beside SCOTT, takes a breath, and begins clarifying the story for the others.

SCOTT nods along at the appropriate story beats until it derails.

MICHAEL

(wholesomely retelling his own divorce without batting an eye)

So you get to heaven, God sits you down, tells you he's leaving because he showed up at your work when you weren't expecting him, found out your computer is made out of Legos and you don't have an actual job, made you take an IQ test only to find you had the mind of a child –

SCOTT

Michael, no, what – ?

MICHAEL

(continuing on, blatantly)

– And then he left you the house but took the kids, and now you get fifty-fifty custody and get to see them every other weekend between the hours of eight p.m. on Friday to eleven a.m. Saturday morning!

Beat.

Everyone, including HARRY, is just looking at MICHAEL.

HARRY
(carefully)

Michael... Did that... Did that *happen*?

MICHAEL
(chortling)

What? HA-ha! Of COURSE it did! I am not a LIAR!

JEAN
(concerned, carefully)

Okay, because... Michael, that does *not* sound like a fair custody agreement...

MICHAEL
No, *silly!* She gets six of the seven days of every week, and I get a golden, fifteen-hour, overnight sliver every other one!

Beat.

HARRY

...No / Michael—

JEAN

...Michael / I'm sorry, I don't think that's half.

MICHAEL stops, frozen in a stupid smile.

MICHAEL
You...might be onto something there, Jeanie.

Beat.

SCOTT
(losing patience)

Okay, guys, we have gotten *so* off-track. It's really not that difficult to—ugh, Jean, get over here.

JEAN uncomfortably goes beside SCOTT.

JEAN

Yep.

SCOTT

Okay, now... Break up with me.

JEAN plasters a fake smile and refuses to make eye contact with SCOTT.

JEAN

(tightly, quickly, smiling, an aside to SCOTT)

(This is really weird, I really don't think this is necessary for the demonstration-)

SCOTT

(insistent)

No, it's not- It's- *Clearly*, no one here understands what went on, so- Just *break up with me*, Jean, it's- I mean, *you know how to do it...*

An uncomfortable beat.

JEAN

(like she's reading cue cards)

...I'm breaking up with you, Scott.

MARTY

(upset)

Oh, come on! She looks nothing like Clone Scott Hot Coochie Big Titty God!

SCOTT gestures for her to go on.

JEAN

(embarrassed, tightly)

...I think we... Want different things... And it's been great, and we've been together awhile... But I - *God* - am moving on. So.... Goodbye.

SCOTT, satisfied, claps for JEAN.

SCOTT

See, guys? It was just like that...

A scarlet JEAN sits down again.

SCOTT (cont.)

...But meaner, so... Yeah.

HARRY

(looking up from the computer)

Scott.

MARTY raises his hand.

SCOTT
(calling on MARTY)

Yeah.

MARTY
So... Quick question... If God is... gone... Then... is the world still ending, and like, who is God... now? Thanks.

SCOTT
No, that's... A good one. Um, so, to answer the second question, *no one*. We simply... Won't have a God now. But frankly, in my personal opinion, I think we're probably better off. Because commitment is an important thing. For a species.

JEAN looks at him, angry.

SCOTT (cont.)
(like school announcements)
And to answer the first question, the world will no longer be ending, and it appears it only was because God felt like he had to throw a fit to even get our attention. But now that he's fully gone, and separated from us, it should be normal now. Cool?

MARTY and MICHAEL celebrate.

HARRY is staring at SCOTT pointedly.

JEAN is now looking away, red.

SCOTT (cont.)
And lemme tell you, heaven without God *is nice*. I mean, really nice. Temperate. Smells like vanilla. Time works differently up there, so I got to spend a good deal of time helping God pack, getting all our stuff, meeting famous people... And this conversation all happened within about two hours of my arrival, but I'd say *this* period was more like five-ish years... Or so...

JEAN
Wait, wait, wait, wait. How long were you there?

SCOTT
(realizing he might be getting himself in more trouble)
Six... Years...

JEAN stares SCOTT down.

The rest of the room grows restless with the tension.

MICHAEL

(getting up, cutting through)

WELL, excellent reporting, Scotty-Boy! My, my, what an adventure you've had. I can't wait to hear it again once it's in print.

MICHAEL, MARTY, and HARRY get up to leave.

MICHAEL goes over to SCOTT to give him a word of advice.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Oh, and *word limits*, Scott. This is why they are *very important*. You were a much better conversationalist this morning.

MICHAEL pats SCOTT on the head.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Good man.

He gets guck on his hand, and looking down, disgusted, wipes it on SCOTT's sleeve. He exits.

MARTY salutes SCOTT and starts to exit.

MARTY

Good luck, mi amigo. Don't do anything I wouldn't do.

He almost fully exits before doubling back to find his bag of chips, the bag now covered in fluids. He sniffs it, then slurps at the crumbs before finally exiting.

HARRY and JEAN, angry and standing apart, remain.

HARRY goes to SCOTT for a brief word in private.

HARRY

Did you mean all of that?

SCOTT

What do you mean, "Did I mean all of that?"

HARRY

Scott, you're my friend, and I want to believe you in all things, I do, but... That... Was uncomfortable.

SCOTT

(sarcastically)

No, you're right, I'm sorry if my *suicide* was *uncomfortable* for you, Harry.

HARRY

C'mon, Scott, you know that's not what I mean.

SCOTT

No, actually, I don't.

Beat.

HARRY

(sighing)

Just... You've got a second chance here. Don't waste it.

SCOTT offers a half-hearted shrug.

Beat.

HARRY hugs SCOTT.

HARRY (cont.)

(strangely)

Welcome back.

He exits.

*SCOTT and JEAN stand oppositely. It's awkward.
And it's quiet.*

JEAN looks at SCOTT, seething.

He slowly makes eye contact with her.

*In a cop-out, he waves at her with the Gun in his
hand, like, "Hi, over there!"*

*She is not amused. He is not a funny person. Never
has been. SCOTT lowers the Gun.*

SCOTT

Jean –

Suddenly, JEAN storms over to where SCOTT is, and he ducks as though she's gonna hit him, but instead, she quickly presses her lips against his.

SCOTT breaks away, confused.

SCOTT (cont.)

Why – ?

JEAN slaps SCOTT sharply across the face. He clutches his face and looks back at her, shocked.

SCOTT (cont.)

What the – ?

JEAN

(angrily, an unapologetic apology)

I KNOW I'M BEING CONFUSING.

Beat.

They face each other, like in a Wild West standoff, SCOTT armed literally, JEAN with an interior arsenal.

SCOTT

You're mad.

JEAN

Yes.

SCOTT

At me.

JEAN

Yes.

SCOTT

Why?

JEAN

Why?

SCOTT

Yes.

JEAN
 Seriously?

SCOTT
 ...Yes.

JEAN
 You fabricated entire portions of your story in a lame attempt to humiliate me in front of all of our coworkers.

SCOTT
 I did not. I told our coworkers an entirely truthful story, and you just so happened to be humiliated in the process.

JEAN
 You honestly expect me to believe that you spending *six years* in heaven and God *breaking up with you* in your *apartment* is all just a huge coincidence?

SCOTT
(truthfully)
 Yes.

JEAN scoffs.

SCOTT (cont.)
 C'mon, Jean. You know I wouldn't lie about this.

Beat.

JEAN shrugs.

SCOTT (cont.)
(angrily)
 Are you *KIDDING ME* – ?

JEAN
 I don't know, Scott! Is it *so crazy* of me to not know if I can believe you? After everything you've put me through in the past day?

SCOTT
 – Everything *I'VE* put *YOU* through?! Right, *right*...

JEAN
 I wanted *nothing more* than for you to stroll back in here a hero, and to be okay, and for everything to be fine again – But Jesus Christ, if you don't make it *FUCKING HARD!*

SCOTT

(exacting, passionate)

There. Is. Nothing. Else. I. Can. Say. Other. Than. I'M. TELLING. THE. TRUTH.

JEAN

“SORRY!”

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)

(verging on emotional)

You could say, “Sorry.”

SCOTT sighs.

JEAN looks away.

JEAN (cont.)

Fine, then. But if that’s the version you’re going to put out into the world in the morning edition, you keep me out of it.

Beat.

SCOTT

(laughing in disbelief)

Jean, what the hell happened?

JEAN looks back at SCOTT.

SCOTT (cont.)

Earlier today, you didn’t try to stop me at all! No— You even gave me a little mission to go on for you. And now I come back, I tell you what went on, God’s honest truth, and *it isn’t enough for you!*

JEAN

Because you’re *stubborn!* And you *LOVE* playing martyr. Scott, *there is no stopping you.* It’s just what you are.

SCOTT

(darkly, shaking his head)

That’s just something people say when they can’t go back and change something they feel guilty about. “There’s nothing I could’ve done.” “It wouldn’t have made a difference.” Fuck that. No. You didn’t try. So just say you didn’t. And move on.

JEAN goes quiet.

SCOTT (cont.)

...And you know, maybe you're right. Maybe I would've shot myself anyway. But part of me wishes you would've tried. Would've tried... saving me... Wishes you would've tried... Fighting, for us. Before. *But.*

JEAN makes a gesture/sound combo of, "Of course. THIS."

SCOTT waves her off with the Gun hand, bitter but appearing casual.

SCOTT (cont.)

You didn't. So let's move on.

Beat.

JEAN

(going through the timeline in her head)

Scott, I always told you I wasn't interested in marriage. But somewhere along the line, it was like you just suddenly decided *you* did and that it *had* to be me. And that wasn't fair. That wasn't fucking fair, Scott. It's not *my job* to endlessly meet your wants and support your Life Goal of the Week just to make you feel better about yourself.

SCOTT looks away, wincing.

JEAN (cont.)

I'm sorry. That was harsh. I'm sorry, Scott.

SCOTT

(not meeting their gaze)

Yeah, well... Once you decided you didn't want to marry me, you decided you didn't want to *be with me*, either. So.

Beat.

JEAN

(quietly)

You always seemed so sad.

SCOTT

(semi-ironic)

Me? Sad? No.

JEAN

No, like, far away. And I never knew how to make it better. You never told me.

SCOTT

But you knew me. You should've just known.

JEAN

I couldn't pull you out of a hole if you didn't offer me your hand.

SCOTT

I tried. You had already moved too far away. I couldn't reach you.

JEAN

(annoyed)

You don't have to get poet— If you're trying to say I was acting like a bitch, then just *say* I was being a bitch.

SCOTT

Fine. You were a bitch.

JEAN

Being a bitch. *Being*. No one is *intrinsically* a bitch.

SCOTT

(under his breath)

(You are.)

JEAN elbows SCOTT. He rubs his arm, almost smiling in spite of himself. This feels old. Familiar. Comfortable.

They both realize it's too warm a gesture and recede.

JEAN

I was worried out of my mind about you today.

SCOTT

(looking off)

I'm touched.

JEAN

But I knew you'd come back.

SCOTT

(sweetly sarcastic)

Oh, well, faith is a nice thing to have.

JEAN sighs, exasperated.

JEAN

If I said I believed you and that I was sorry about the slap, can...*this*...stop?

SCOTT

Don't be sorry about the slap then, be sorry about the kiss. I'm not a piece of *meat*, Jean.

JEAN actually smiles.

SCOTT catches her.

She stops.

Beat.

JEAN

...So my dad?

SCOTT

(turning around)

Huh?

JEAN

You never mentioned anything about my dad. Before.

SCOTT

(genuinely bewildered)

Oh.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

Right, right, right, right... Sit, sit down...

He motions for JEAN to sit down beside him on the desk. She is listening intently. He sets the Gun down on the desk beside him.

SCOTT clears his throat.

SCOTT (cont.)

(not making eye contact with JEAN)

Yeah, so your...your dad is doing really great. He looked good, he...he asked how you were doing, I said you were good, (told him that we broke up, ha), um... He... He seems really at peace. Really, uh, doing good. Really.

JEAN stiffens a bit. She watches SCOTT closely.

JEAN
(incredulous)

Really?

SCOTT
(empathically)

Really.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

*And— ! And he, uh, he was doing a lot of fishing up there. Great lakes up in heaven, I mean, obviously not *the* Great Lakes, but, um, good, good lakes—*

JEAN

Fishing?

SCOTT

Fishing, yeah.

JEAN

My dad doesn't fish.

SCOTT
(very quickly)

Oh, well— Everyone, uh, fishes up in—

JEAN
(hollow)

You didn't see him when you were up there, did you?

SCOTT takes a sharp inhale and almost goes to lie again— But he stops, fighting back a cough instead.

Beat.

SCOTT
(solemnly)

I did not.

JEAN nods to herself, like she knew this might be a possibility. She takes a few deep breaths and turns away from SCOTT for a moment, then back again, at war with her feelings.

SCOTT (cont.)
(concerned)

Jean...

JEAN holds up a hand and forces a smile through her contorted face.

JEAN

I'm fine. I'm fine. Seriously. I'm good.

Beat.

She knows SCOTT doesn't believe her.

JEAN (cont.)

Scott... I'm fine. I— I had considered— I mean, I *knew* it was a possibility.

Long beat.

It gets very quiet.

SCOTT

...Just because I didn't see him / doesn't mean he's not —

JEAN

/ Right. Right.

SCOTT

I did try, Jean. I looked for so long. Asked everyone I could.

JEAN

(thinking out loud)

And that's why...

SCOTT

Six years.

JEAN

You looked for my dad for *six years*?

SCOTT looks back at her earnestly.

JEAN (cont.)

Thank you.

JEAN puts her head on SCOTT's shoulder.

And for coming back.

JEAN (cont.)
They sit for a moment, in silence.
JEAN softens.

Did we ever have fun?

JEAN (cont.)
SCOTT relaxes, chuckles.

“Did we ever have fun?” she asks.

SCOTT
(bemused by her)

It’s a very real question.

JEAN

Then I’ll give you a very real answer.

SCOTT
JEAN gives SCOTT a look.

Ah, sure, we did. Remember the beach? On our third?

SCOTT (cont.)
(off her look)
JEAN scowls for a moment, thinking.

You did. You did have fun on that trip, I remember.

SCOTT (cont.)
(alarmed)
JEAN looks away, smiling slightly and not allowing him the satisfaction.
SCOTT’s worry grows.

You did.

SCOTT (cont.)
(quietly)

Always so worried. And about all the wrong things.

JEAN
(softly)

SCOTT
(missing it)

Huh?

JEAN

So what do we do now?

SCOTT

Uh...I mean, I could always be a piece of meat again, if you wanted.

JEAN jabs him with her elbow.

She puts her head back on his shoulder.

SCOTT (cont.)

Okay, okay... I mean... I guess things go back to normal.

JEAN

“Normal.”

SCOTT

Heh... I don't, I don't know.

JEAN

I'm pretty sick of “normal.”

SCOTT

...Me, too.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

I was thinking I might move somewhere... Start over. That way.... *This* won't be an issue.

JEAN

That's an idea.

SCOTT

Yeah.

JEAN

Like, where?

SCOTT

...Well, there's always seminary.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)
(entertained by the idea)

...I mean, I would be a fucking rockstar there now.

JEAN
(playing along)

True— There is that celibacy clause, though.

SCOTT

Oh, easy.

JEAN rolls her eyes and smiles.

JEAN

Well, it's a solid plan. You could do that.

Something shifts.

JEAN (cont.)
(softly)

Or...

Beat.

JEAN (cont.)
(gently)

Maybe you could stay. And maybe we could make something good out of all of this.

JEAN holds SCOTT's gaze.

JEAN (cont.)
(softly, importantly)

I didn't mean what I said – I mean, I didn't want to get married, but I don't wish you were dead.

Beat.

SCOTT stares at her.

JEAN (cont.)
(with a tearful laugh)

I didn't like you being dead.

SCOTT

Yeah?

JEAN
(smiling)

Yeah.

SCOTT
(happily but tinged with sarcasm)

Wow. Thank you. You should write greeting cards.

They stand there for a moment, smiling at one another, happy to be alive, happy to be here, happy to have each other.

SCOTT (cont.)

So what now?

JEAN sighs, happy and exasperated.

JEAN
We... Could always go back to the drawing board? Revisit old plans? I have on good authority that Cancun is a great honeymoon spot.

SCOTT

What do you mean?

JEAN gives him a, "You really don't get it?" look.

She looks around the cubicle and dashes for the desk drawers. There, she pulls out the blue, bouncing ball. She trots back to SCOTT, places it in the palm of his hand, and holds it.

JEAN
(intimately, playfully)

Scott Thomas Butler... It's been six years and two lifetimes... This is incredibly redundant, but I'm woman enough to admit when I'm wrong... *And I was wrong, okay?* There. So... Would you *re-propose* to me...or whatever?

SCOTT gazes back at her in euphoric happiness, clutching the ball in his fist.

JEAN beams back at him.

He chuckles, pulling his hand away from hers to examine the ball in his hand, preparing to say something smart.

But then— SCOTT's smile fades.

A confused expression overtakes him.

The ball falls to the floor.

JEAN, suddenly concerned, takes a step towards him.

JEAN (cont.)
(worried)

What's wrong? Was it something I said?

SCOTT's mind is racing. He steps back from JEAN.

JEAN (cont.)
(increasingly scared)

It's okay if you need more time – I mean, *God*, you've been through so much – I didn't mean to rush into –

SCOTT stumbles. He is suddenly overtaken with a powerful coughing fit, worse than ever before. He grips onto the desk for support.

JEAN (cont.)
(diving to help him)

SCOTT!

JEAN goes to him and tries to hold him up.

His body continues to convulse with tremors.

JEAN (cont.)
(holding him)

No, no, no, no, no, no, no....

SCOTT goes still.

JEAN lets out a panicked sound, and immediately checks his pulse. She begins chest compressions.

Moments pass.

JEAN does not give up.

JEAN (cont.)
(continuing)

P-Please...

Suddenly, SCOTT's eyes open, and out of his mouth comes a shower of water.

JEAN, shocked and overjoyed, helps him onto his side.

JEAN (cont.)

Shhh... It's okay... You're okay...

SCOTT lies there, trying to catch his breath, in a puddle of his own making.

His mind is still racing.

He stares at the water around him and reaches out to touch it, testing his reality.

SCOTT
(breathing heavily, almost a whisper)

I never made it out...

JEAN
(also breathing heavily, still relieved)

What?

SCOTT

I never made it out of the tub...

JEAN

What are you talking about?

SCOTT

Y-You...*left*... And I-I got in the tub... And I ran the water... And I....

SCOTT scrambles to his feet. The sudden movement frightens JEAN.

He panickedly looks around the room.

SCOTT (cont.)

None of this is real.

He sets the Gun down on the desk and begins dashing around the room, looking for evidence, an exit, an entrance, anything.

JEAN
(concerned)

Scott, you need to rest– !

SCOTT looks offstage.

SCOTT
J-Jean, where's your desk? *The rest of the office... Isn't here... Why is the whole office just my cubicle??*

JEAN
(chasing after him)

Scott, you are exhausted and sick and you just died *twice– !*

SCOTT
(hysterically laughing)

IT ALL MAKES SENSE!

He turns to JEAN.

SCOTT (cont.)
You almost had me... And I *wanted* it to be true, so, *so* badly... But Jean... You don't want to marry me.

JEAN stares back at him, confused.

SCOTT (cont.)
That's the one thing I do know.

He begins walking towards her.

SCOTT (cont.)
You said it yourself... How eerily similar it all was... With God... And you... And the coughing! God, *the coughing!* I should've known...

JEAN
Scott, you're scaring me.

SCOTT
I don't even remember how I got to work this morning... It was like suddenly, I was here....

JEAN
Scott, you're not making any sense– !

SCOTT

And that's okay!

He puts his hands on her shoulders.

SCOTT (cont.)

(a hilarious moment of clarity)

...Because *you* are not Jean, and *I* am dead.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

Or dying.

He puts his hands in JEAN's.

She feels them, confused.

SCOTT (cont.)

See? All pruned up.

SCOTT backs away.

JEAN starts piecing it together for herself.

JEAN

(with increasingly emotion)

Scott... You... You *drowned yourself*... After I left?

SCOTT just looks at her.

JEAN (cont.)

W-Why... would you *do that*?

SCOTT is silent.

JEAN (cont.)

(crying)

Why did you do that??

Beat.

SCOTT

(hysteria subsiding, giving way to despair)

You... Were the one thing... I was ever sure about... And you left...

He tries to swallow a sob.

SCOTT (cont.)

And I... *Can't*... Be alone...

SCOTT stands adrift center stage. His stance is almost childlike.

JEAN goes to him. A shift.

JEAN clutches SCOTT's face, teary, with the oldest kind of love.

JEAN
(pleadingly, deeply)

Then let me go.

She strokes his cheek.

JEAN (cont.)

Let me go, Scott.

SCOTT
(crying into her hands)

I can't, Jean, I can't do it. I'll— I'll crack open, I'll just burst open—

JEAN
No. It'll hurt for a bit, and then you'll go on living.

SCOTT
But maybe I don't want to—

JEAN
(stern)
No, Scott. You have to. Do you hear me? You must. *Live for yourself. Want to live.*

SCOTT breaks out of her grip, backing away from her like she just hit him, crying.

SCOTT
(fighting for his life)
No, *no*, no — YOU *told me* you wished I was DEAD. You *don't get to take that back*. You don't *get to switch sides* because I actually *did something about it*. You don't *get that*, Jean. So fuck you. Let me die with some semblance of fucking *peace*, and I sincerely hope you go on living and hating yourself every fucking day for what *you did to me*.

JEAN looks away, stoney.

SCOTT (cont.)

(wrathful)

That's right, Jean. I don't want you to die, but I hope you want to. Everyday of your miserable life. I hope you find me up in that bathtub, and I hope you call an ambulance, and I hope you have to wait with my wrinkled, blue corpse, and I hope you try to perform CPR on me, and I hope you fail. Because this is all your fault. And you might try to blame me. You can try to call me sick, you can try to chalk it up to disagreements and misunderstandings and negligence, but you know the truth. THIS RELATIONSHIP DIED ON YOUR WATCH, JEAN!

SCOTT knocks the monitor off his desk.

JEAN trembles.

SCOTT (cont.)

And I don't know why I'm stuck here. I don't know why I had to go and dream you up all over again. But if this is God's way of fucking torturing me for fucking killing myself, I hope you feel *real good* about your being here. So fuck you, Jean. See you in hell.

HARRY comes bursting in.

HARRY

(concerned)

What's going on? What's wrong?

SCOTT

(grandly, seething, with a little bow)

OH, Harry, good, you're here. Um, congrats, you're a figment of my imagination as my body lies dying in my bathtub down on planet Earth. So, uh, yeah— you aren't real... Jean's a hateful bitch... God is, probably, dead... And I am really, really bad at killing myself. So that about covers it. Thanks for dropping by.

HARRY

(ignoring him, to JEAN)

Jean, are you okay?

JEAN nods, silent tears falling down her face.

SCOTT uses this as fuel.

SCOTT

(throwing his hands in the air)

OH, yes, please, *CHECK ON JEAN!*

HARRY

(to Scott, corrective)

What has gotten into you, man?

SCOTT

(not believing what he's hearing)

What— ? OKAY, okay...

SCOTT paces around for a moment, then whips back with a retort.

SCOTT (cont.)

Now, you— you, Harry— I dreamt up *just right*. Just like I remember ya. *Switzerland* Harry. *Bleeding fucking heart* Harry. Send everyone away with a hug and a kiss. Right? That'll make it *all better!*

HARRY remains unmoved by SCOTT.

HARRY

Scott.

SCOTT

You wanna know what happened at seminary, Harry? You really wanna know? I fucking tried to kill myself, Harry! That's right! I tried to slit my wrists in a confessional! And when they found me, and they patched me up, and they spit me out— There you were! Ready to drive me away! And you say I never told you, Harry? Bullshit. Fucking bullshit. YOU SAW THE BANDAGES, HARRY. I SAW YOU SEE AND THEN I SAW YOU LOOK AWAY. You've been hanging this sword over my head all these years, saying I don't tell you shit, that the only reason I'm in the kind of trouble I am is because of me, and that it's my own fault, and that I withhold— but NO.

SCOTT is now hysterical. He is screaming through a sob, trapped in his throat.

SCOTT (cont.)

You were disgusted by me. You saw what I had done and you looked away. Because you couldn't let me not be okay. And they couldn't either. You all... pretend to care. But when I needed you most... YOU looked away, and YOU left. And then you... Ask me... "What's wrong?"

He stands there, heaving, daring either of them to counter anything he's said.

No one says a word.

SCOTT (cont.)

(turning in towards self-pity)

And none of this is even real. I mean, *fuck*.... Just a ghost yelling at some ghosts.

Long pause.

HARRY painfully looks away, and JEAN, her face wet with tears, faces SCOTT.

JEAN
(almost a whisper)

I loved you.

SCOTT faces her.

SCOTT
(the final blow)

You left.

Beat.

JEAN's face contorts with pain and fury.

She gets very close.

JEAN
(hurt)

You know what I think? I think your life was already so *empty* when you met me, that *when* I left, it was the end of the fucking world. But you are just *so wracked* with *guilt* and *shame*, that you couldn't live with it— *much less die with it*. So you cling to this little Savior-of-Earth fantasy, where you love me *so much* that you kill yourself to save me and everybody else. But here's the truth, *Scott*— It's got nothing to do with how much you love me, and only with how much you hate yourself. But your ego is *so* cosmically massive that the only way it can deal with all this self-loathing is to create a delusion so *absurd* that it casts you as the *abandoned child*. Well, guess what, *Scott*? I'm not gonna treat you like a kid anymore. And it's time for you to get some *fucking accountability*. No, it's not “the universe's fault,” it's not Harry's, it's not God's, *it's not mine*— it's yours.

Beat.

SCOTT
(venomous)

How does it feel to have had two people kill themselves because of you?

JEAN slaps SCOTT.

SCOTT raises his hand— HARRY dives for SCOTT and holds him back—

JEAN
(empty)

It's okay, Harry. Let him. Since none of this is *real*.

SCOTT fights against HARRY.

He catches JEAN's empty, broken gaze.

Beat.

He stops fighting against HARRY. His hand lowers.

Cautiously, HARRY lets him go.

JEAN holds her gaze, daring him to make a move.

Beat.

SCOTT

Okay... Okay, okay, okay... *Okay...*

SCOTT suddenly falls to his knees, sobbing.

He cries for some time, holding himself like a child, tugging at his own hair as punishment. He wails and hits himself, too shattered to put behind it any real force.

SCOTT (cont.)
(sobbing)

I'm- I'm s-sorry... I'm so, so s-sorry....

HARRY and JEAN watch.

SCOTT (cont.)
(sobbing)

This was m-me... Th-this w-w-was all... me....

He curls into a ball, crying.

HARRY puts a hand on JEAN's shoulder. They stand together and witness the death of a friend.

After several moments, JEAN's face displays the tiniest traces of pity. She kneels beside him and puts an arm around him.

JEAN
(more like a mother than a wife)

Shhhh...

SCOTT continues to cry.

JEAN holds SCOTT.

After a moment, SCOTT speaks.

SCOTT
(wrecked)

Sometimes I wonder if I was ever happy. Or if I was just— Just one of those people who never...
 Got the trick of it...

He looks at JEAN with deep remorse.

SCOTT (cont.)
(breathless, hopeless)

I'm so sorry, Jean. I am so, so sorry.

JEAN continues holding SCOTT. She rests her chin on his head, looking out, thinking.

They sit like this for several moments.

SCOTT jerks his head towards where HARRY still stands.

SCOTT (cont.)

Harry...

HARRY sighs and shakes his head to himself.

HARRY

Hey, just... Save it for the real Harry. Yeah?

Beat.

SCOTT continues anyway.

SCOTT

You were always there. Doing what you could.... And I want you to know that I know that.

HARRY offers a sad smile and shuffles his feet.

HARRY

Sure, but not then. At seminary. There was more I could've–

SCOTT

Save it for the real Scott.

SCOTT offers a small smile in return.

Just then, the Gun on the desk begins to glow.

ALL look towards it.

HARRY, after a moment, goes towards it and gently picks it up. With great reverence and attention, as if performing a sacrament, he takes it towards SCOTT and kneels down beside him.

HARRY

I can't... Tell you what to do. But I'd *hope*... Well.

He hands it to SCOTT, who takes it.

HARRY (cont.)

I'd hope that maybe this isn't the way out next time.

He stands, looking a little hurt, a little sad, and a little worried.

HARRY (cont.)

I'll see you, Scott.

He goes to leave.

SCOTT removes himself from JEAN's embrace to stand and face his friend.

SCOTT

Harry, wait.

HARRY turns around.

SCOTT (cont.)

(going for a lighter note)

I'm sorry about not finding out...Lady Di, I mean. I can't say for sure, but I feel like it was probably just a drunk driving/high-speed pursuit situation.

HARRY sighs and shakes his head.

HARRY

Human error... is *such* a disappointing reason.

Beat.

SCOTT

Thank you, Harry.

HARRY gives SCOTT a long look.

He exits.

SCOTT turns to JEAN. The Gun remains in his hands.

SCOTT (cont.)

Jean, I—

He stops himself.

SCOTT (cont.)

(weirded out but desperate)

Sorry. I guess I don't know who, or what, you really are.

JEAN

(with a weird smile)

I'm just as confused as you are.

SCOTT

(attempting a smile)

Right, right... Well, yeah, I guess you would be.

Beat.

JEAN

(an offer)

I can be something else if you want.

JEAN starts looking around for costume pieces while SCOTT stammers about.

SCOTT

(embarrassed)

I mean, sure – I mean, whatever makes you feel most.... Most comfortable...

JEAN disappears behind the back cubicle wall.

SCOTT stops and faces forward, giving her privacy.

JEAN re-enters, though not quite herself. She wears a men's overcoat, which hangs so monstrously over her small frame that it looks as though she would be swallowed up in it. Her hair is loosely tied up in a cap, and a great, auburn mustache has been glued to her upper lip. She looks like a child playing pretend.

In her hunter's boots, several sizes too large for her, she marches over to where SCOTT sits and plops down beside him.

Just then, MICHAEL enters.

MICHAEL
(entering)

Oh, SCOTT! I almost forgot to— !

He notices JEAN. And SCOTT. He takes in the situation he has just walked into.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(with approval)

Ooooo! Freudian!

MICHAEL reaches behind him and pulls out what looks to be a little league baseball trophy with a sticky note on it that reads, "BEST AT JOB EVER." He gives it to SCOTT.

MICHAEL (cont.)
(enthusiastically)

Scott Butler, I may be a figment of your imagination, but I would be remiss if I didn't present you with this "Best Employee at Job Ever" Award. You're a helluva man, and a helluva waiter-jockey-ballerina-whatever it is we do at this...restaurant. Yes. Good. ...I am going to exit the plot now. Good work, team!

He exits.

Pause.

SCOTT, feeling a little awkward about what this encounter has revealed about himself, lets out a nervous laugh.

SCOTT

(a joke with no energy behind it)

I won. *Heh.*

Beat.

JOHN/JEAN

(in a gruff man's voice)

That's not very funny, son.

SCOTT sets the trophy down.

Long pause.

JEAN...or "JOHN"....goes on speaking as though they were already in the middle of a conversation.

JOHN/JEAN reaches into their coat pocket and pulls out a large pipe. In another pocket, JOHN/JEAN takes out a set of matches and strikes one. They light the pipe and take a puff.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

(sucking on the pipe)

And how is my Jeanie?

SCOTT

Fine, I think. Better off now, probably.

JOHN/JEAN

(a bit cold, formal)

Healthy, I suppose? Good color to her?

SCOTT squirms at the question.

SCOTT

Yes.

JOHN/JEAN takes another puff.

JOHN/JEAN

Good.

The two sit in sudden, merciless silence.

SCOTT makes a sudden move.

SCOTT

I was told to ask you–

JOHN/JEAN
(quickly)

Yes?

SCOTT looks to JOHN and sees too much of JEAN.

SCOTT

Nevermind.

JOHN/JEAN sucks on their pipe.

JOHN/JEAN

So things didn't work out between you two, did they?

SCOTT begins to squirm once more at this unexpected change.

SCOTT
(swallowing)

No... sir.

Beat.

JOHN/JEAN

So, *what* went so wrong, if you don't mind me asking?

SCOTT

She didn't want me.

JOHN/JEAN

Try again.

SCOTT

She didn't want me, sir.

JOHN/JEAN

“Want” doesn't have the power to kill, my boy.

SCOTT grows restless in his seat.

SCOTT

Look, it's very simple: I was ready to get married, I asked.... *Several times....* And each time, she said, "No." "No," "no," "no," "no," "no"..... And by the last time I asked, she said, "Never."

JOHN/JEAN moves to put the pipe in their mouth.

JOHN/JEAN
(suddenly as JEAN)

I said, "*Maybe never.*"

SCOTT

What?

JOHN/JEAN
(back to JOHN, a grave memory)

I didn't even feel it.

SCOTT, a bit perturbed by the sudden change in conversation, just watches them.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)
(staring out)

Do you feel yours?

SCOTT

My chest is... Kind of tight... Like panic, but worse. And the—

He coughs, then stops.

JOHN/JEAN
(“no big thing”)

Ah, that's just your body fighting you off.

SCOTT grimaces, then almost goes for a joke— but looks at them and stops.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)
(continuing, staring)

Sometimes I wish I had. Retributions, I guess. Better for me to have felt a bullet ricochet through my skull than for Jean and her mother to have gone through all that. As if it could be one or the other....

SCOTT watches them.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

Watching that.... From here.... Has made me wish I had.... Suffered.

They sigh.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

But nothing to be done. Better to cut our losses then, I suppose.

Beat.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

Any regrets, Scott? That's a fun one to ask.

SCOTT

I guess I'm sort of... Taking care of that now.

JOHN/JEAN
(*genuinely*)

Interesting.

Beat.

SCOTT

Why didn't I see you? Before? When I thought I had died?

JOHN/JEAN considers this.

JOHN/JEAN

...*My* regrets... Were many. But my time ran out five years ago now, to the date... And *guilt*, you know, is a funny thing. It's sort of an energy... Can't be created, it's never destroyed... And that's a very *Catholic* observation. I'd always thought that's why we were so good at Easter, the best, really, out of all of the... Demographics. We can look up, see a man cast in shadow, bleeding, dying, crying out... And it gives us meaning. We light candles. We sing solemn hymns. And it *fuels* us. Gives us a sort of appreciation for what we have. And it's sick, it really is... That we... Send these women and these boys who kill themselves... To hell... When we so wholeheartedly rush to our cathedrals to celebrate a man who willingly walked into his own destruction... I have a theory. I think Jesus was the first suicide. I mean, think about it. Who told him to do it? God. Who was Jesus? God. Anyway, it just makes me think, from an early age, we see that... And we're told it's the model... And there's a part of every kid that just goes, "*Man...* It'd be really nice to save the world and end the pain, all in one." *Unto your hands*, right?

He looks at SCOTT.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

And some of us took that a little *too* literally, but that's okay. For me... I sort of felt I was doing the same. That they'd be better off. But every time I think about it now, and I look around and realize I was wrong... I don't really hate myself, but I do sort of hate Jesus.

SCOTT looks confused.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

Sorry if that wasn't an answer. In my defense, at the end of the day, I really only know what you know.

SCOTT

You're not at peace then?

JOHN/JEAN
(obviously)

No.

SCOTT

She's...not gonna like that.

JOHN/JEAN chuckles bitterly.

JOHN/JEAN

Are you?

SCOTT absentmindedly brushes the bullethole in his skull.

SCOTT

Evidently not.

Beat.

SCOTT (cont.)

I think maybe I just hate myself for putting her through that again. I mean, we got together... Not long before you... You know. And I remember sitting at that funeral, and telling myself that I was gonna take care of her, that I wasn't gonna be you... And sometimes... When I'd start giving up... I'd watch you fly past her eyes... And so I'd push on, for her. And so when she – When we broke up, it was like I didn't have anyone I cared enough about to keep living for.

JOHN/JEAN

Piece of advice?

SCOTT looks at them.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

It's the most selfish thing you can do, living for someone else.

SCOTT

...Right.

JOHN/JEAN gets up.

JOHN/JEAN

So if you're gonna do it, do it for you. If not, just stick around. Pretty soon that panic feeling should give way. Or fire that little guy, that should do the trick, if you want it done faster. But remember your time is valuable. Do what you gotta do, I won't judge. Not like I'm in a position to anyway. There. Now you got your empathy.

JOHN/JEAN begins to walk away.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

Well, you've got a call to make. If you do end up seeing Jean, I maybe wouldn't mention this part. It's a little out-of-genre.

SCOTT

Where are you going?

JOHN/JEAN

(without turning around)

Does it matter?

SCOTT panics.

JOHN/JEAN continues to exit.

JOHN/JEAN (cont.)

(to themselves, without turning around)

(It's not the end of the world...)

They exit.

SCOTT is alone.

MARTY enters.

MARTY

(playing cool)

Hey, uh, Scotty... A little birdie told me that none of this is real, that you're functioning as the pseudo-god of this meta-reality, and I, as I exist now, do not, in fact, exist. Facts?

SCOTT

Yeah, I guess so.

MARTY

Cool cool.

He goes to SCOTT and whispers in his ear for an obscene amount of time.

SCOTT
(sighing)

Sure, Marty.

After a moment, MARTY looks down and, pulling his waistband out in front of him, checks his groin. Pleased with the enhancements, MARTY nods and admires himself.

MARTY
(patting SCOTT on the back)

Scotty, you're a real one. Alright. Have fun actually fuckin' doing it this time, ya pussy. Marty out.

MARTY winks at the audience.

SCOTT notices this and gives MARTY a little shrug like, "Why, man?"

MARTY goes white....looks at the audience, caught, and exits. This play has gotten too weird for him.

SCOTT, "alone," briefly looks at the audience, then after MARTY, then down at his shoes.

SCOTT
(a slight smile, bemused consideration)

Hm.

Suddenly, the office phone rings.

SCOTT quickly turns toward it, caught off-guard, but with a strange kind of alertness – an odd sort of calm.

It rings again, as SCOTT considers his options.

He looks to the Gun, glowing its celestial glow... Calling him far away from this life and to another.

He looks at the phone, blinking and ringing once more, ready to be picked up.

SCOTT looks between the two of them, overwhelmed by the decision, unsure of which is the greater terror.

The phone rings.

The Gun glows brighter.

Then – he notices the blue, rubber ball. He picks it up.

The phone rings.

The Gun glows.

The phone beeps, about to go to voicemail– !

SCOTT holds the whole world in his hands.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY