

GOD HELP US

two act dark religious comedy

by Jeremy Kehoe

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SYNOPSIS

It turns out Nietzsche was wrong: god isn't dead; he's just been tied up at a meeting – a cosmically long meeting – at the Galactic Council. Now's he's back and bucking harder than ever to George-Jefferson his way out of his middle-manager post in a third-rate galaxy. As god works to polish his Milky-Way resume, one nasty, black smear threatens to doom his ladder-climbing plans: the atrocities perpetrated by the inhabitants of third planet from its sun in a rinky-dink solar system – all with his supposed seal of approval.

As god speeds through Earth's CliffsNotes from his two-thousand year absence, he decides this planetary stain on his cosmic ledger cannot stand. His solution is simple: eliminate the problem by erasing Earth from his bottom line altogether. One snag in his divine business plan is the obscure DaVinci Clause which states god cannot wipe Earth from his spreadsheet until every inhabitant renounces their faith in him. So, he sets out to disabuse his fans of the myth of his benevolent nature – with extreme prejudice.

CAST LIST

GOD: Himself, in his coloring-book glory

SAINT PETER: Saint Peter, as the Bible paints him

JESUS: Himself; starring as Jesus

COKE ZERO ANGEL: Off stage – could be double cast

NEWSCASTER: Off-Stage, delivers the day's news

ISIAH FERGUSON: Late teens, early 20s; lives at home with his mom

REBECCA FERGUSON: Mid 40s, early 50s; religious to the point of delusion; her faith in god is unwavering

UMBER: Isiah's friend. Always off-stage.

ACT ONE
Scene One

(Open to a WHITE STAGE doused in a bright, but soft, WHITE LIGHT. A CNN-style PRAYER TICKER scrolls across the back wall. Interspersed among the scrolling prayers are requests for God's help resolving larger issues – bringing peace to Middle East, ending hunger, etc. – but most are requests for personal favors. There is a small LAPTOP on top of a WHITE DESK; two WHITE CHAIRS sit perpendicular to the audience. ENTER SAINT PETER, clad in a WHITE ROBE flecked with red spots. He RUSHES IN with a PLATE OF NACHOS AND a BOWL of SALSA. He makes space for the PLATE and BOWL and gives everything a quick once-over with a rag. O/S we hear the heavy, methodic pounding of GOD'S footsteps.)

GOD

Fe, fi, fo fum!

(GOD ENTERS, in full coloring-book glory: flowing WHITE LOCKS with matching BEARD and a regal WHITE ROBE, cinched at the waist by a thick GOLDEN ROPE. SAINT PETER wheels around toward GOD and kneels.)

Psych! I'm just playin', Pete. Up, up, up. C'mere and give a creator a hug!

(SAINT PETER rises and give GOD a timid hug, barely wrapping his arms around GOD's shoulders.)

You never were much a hugger, were you, P? That's cool. Whatever.

(GOD takes a step back and twirls around.)

So?

SAINT PETER

So.

GOD

Notice anything different?

SAINT PETER

I'm sorry, Your Holiness, I don't –

GOD

Haircut! Haricut! I got my haircut. Geez, you're supposed to be my eyes and ears, Pete.

SAINT PETER

Sorry.

GOD

Ah, it's OK.

(beat)

Well?

SAINT PETER

Well?

GOD

Do you like it?! Geez, you're makin' me fish here, Pete.

SAINT PETER

Oh, yes, yes, yes. It's very nice. Very, uh, flattering.

GOD

It better be. Cost enough. Fat lot of good it did me with the Galactic Council. I tell you: this middle-management stuff is steaming shit in a paper bag. Do you have any idea what it's like to sit at a meeting and know that no one respects your opinion? To have every idea you toss around get tossed out? To have people talk right over you? I swear, I'm never gonna make it out of this two-bit galaxy.

(GOD lets out an exaggerated sigh)

Nevermind. No one wants to hear *god's* problems.

(beat)

This is the part where you're supposed to say, "Really?! I care! Tell me more!"

SAINT PETER

I'm sorry.

GOD

Forget it. I don't want to talk about work anymore. It's boring. What's been going on around here? How long was I gone for, anyway? Felt like a thousand years.

SAINT PETER

Two thousand, actually.

GOD

Two ? Man, those corner-office Council types never tire of climbing the mountaintop and chewing the scenery.

SAINT PETER

Yes, time does fly, Your Holiness.

GOD

"Holiness"! Manners! You're Old School, Pete. That's what I always liked about you.

SAINT PETER

I brought you nachos.

GOD

Oooh! Nachos! I'm famished.

(GOD rushes over to the table, sits, and like a rescued castaway, begins jamming fistful after fistful of chips into his mouth. He pauses only occasionally to dip the NACHOS into the SALSA – frequently double dipping. His hands and face quickly become a mess. The sight repulses SAINT PETER.)

GOD

Have a seat, Pete.

(SAINT PETER SITS, while GOD continues to feed his face.)

Mind if I meet and eat?

SAINT PETER

We are in your house, Your Holiness.

GOD

Always liked you, Pete. First time I saw you, I said, “Now there’s a guy with a good head on his shoulders. Not like that John the Baptist nut job.”

(GOD roars loudly at his own joke. SAINT PETER flashes a strained smile, pulls the CHAIR a few feet away from the desk, then sits. GOD dives back into his NACHOS. SAINT PETER, leans to avoid GOD’s spittle. GOD finally leans back and sighs, then wipes his hands on SAINT PETER’s ROBE again.)

Whew! Hosanna in the Highest! Not bad. Not bad at all! Who’s the chef?

SAINT PETER

Mother Teresa.

GOD

Never heard of her.

SAINT PETER

Fairly new. She can lean on the holier-than-thou crutch a little once too often for my liking, but she certainly knows how to tame an oven.

GOD

So, I got your text. What’s up? You’ve got fifteen. After that I gotta make like the Red Sea and split.

(GOD explodes in laughter. SAINT PETER can only muster a faint smile.)

SAINT PETER *(weakly)*

Yes, good one.

(GOD suppresses a few more chuckles.)

GOD

OK. Lay it on me, Pete. But seriously: make it lickety, ‘cuz I gotta bounce. God’s got places to be.

SAINT PETER

OK. Well –

GOD

Hold up. What's with all the heat? I'm sweating my Matzo Balls off.

SAINT PETER

Actually, that's one of the reasons I wanted to meet. It seems the people on the blue planet have failed to accept that their individual actions have a collective impact larger than themselves.

GOD

That's because they're morons.

SAINT PETER

Yes, we are all aware of your Eighty-Percent Asshole Rule, Your Holiness. However –

GOD

They're morons, Pete.

SAINT PETER

If we could just quickly go through my presentation, I think you'll see there are some larger issues on that planet that will require more direct –

GOD

I'm thirsty. Where's my Coke Zero Angel?

(GOD yells up to the HEAVENS)

Coke Zero!

(We hear the sound of a PHONE ringing)

You sure you like the hair?

(An ANSWERING MACHINE beeps, then the sultry voice of the COKE ZERO ANGEL.)

COKE ZERO ANGEL

Hi. You've reached the Coke Zero Network. We're so sorry we can't fulfill your immediate Coke Zero desires. But leave us a message, and we'll make sure your eternal Coke Zero fantasies come true. Bye, now.

(Another BEEP ends the call.)

GOD

What the hell's going on here? What kind of heaven is this when the boss can't get order up the eternal and everlasting elixir? There used to be a time, Pete. There used to be a time when I could snap my fingers – snap! Like that! – and so many angels across the heavens would flap their wings to serve me a cocktail there'd be a monsoon.

GOD (CONT'D)

Hell, I didn't even need to *ask*. All I'd have to do was *think* "drink", and saints by the ark-load would be tripping over themselves to slake my thirst with that carbonated Council juice. Now I get answering machines? W-T-F?

SAINT PETER

Yes, well, angels today: certainly not the greatest generation.

GOD

In my day, you'd get communicated with an 'X' for shit like this.

SAINT PETER

If we could just get on with my presentation, Your Holiness.

GOD (*brightens*)

Your Holiness.

(GOD musses up SAINT PETERS HAIR.)

All right. Show me whatcha got, pretty momma.

(SAINT PETER moves to the LAPTOP and turns it to face GOD.)

SAINT PETER

Now –

GOD

Wait.

SAINT PETER

Oh, good lord.

GOD

Isn't Elijah supposed to be in this meeting?

SAINT PETER

I texted him, but he never replied.

GOD

That son of a bitch is never on time.

SAINT PETER

I left the door open for him.

GOD

Forget him. Close the damn door. And lock it.

(SAINT PETER rises, closes the DOOR, sits back down.)

I'm gonna tell you something: I'm tired of this bullshit. There's gonna be some changes around here. Big-time changes.

(GOD INHALES deeply, then EXHALES loudly, directly into SAINT PETER's face. SAINT PETER turns away at the odor of GOD's TORTILLA-CHIP breath.)

GOD

All right. Let's take stock of the flock.

SAINT PETER

Now, I know things may look a little dicey at first, so I want to encourage you from jumping to any immediate conclusions.

GOD

P-Dog, please. How long have we known each other, huh? We've both tossed some pretty crazy shit-storm salads in our day, right? How bad can it be? Fire it up.

(SAINT PETER click-starts computer presentation, takes a few steps back.)

SAINT PETER

I've set it at god speed.

GOD

Fine, fine, fine. Damn, I'm thirsty.

(The presentation whizzes along at god speed. GOD scans the screen with disinterest at first, but his eyes widen until they nearly burst from their sockets.)

Whoa, whoa, whoa. What the fuck? What the fuck is this? These people put my name on all that? What the fuck is going on? I didn't sign off on any of that.

SAINT PETER

I know there are some distressing moments. . .

GOD

Distressing moments? What the 'F', P? This is the worst fucking place in the galaxy! I step out of the office for a big-bang blink, and these people hit every Deadly Sin in the book, and twice on Tuesdays! This is a calamity.

SAINT PETER

I know it looks bad. However –

GOD

“However” nothin'. You don't understand. I can't have this. There's already talk of demoting me to the piss-ant Wilman Galaxy. If news of trouble out here in the sticks leaks upstairs, they'll send me straight out to schlep rocks with Sisyphus until the cows get tired of mooing. This is no good. This is no good. What do we do? What do we do? Think, think.

SAINT PETER

May I suggest –?

GOD

Yes. No. Wait. OK. Hold on. Yes. Right. Here's what we do. We pull the plug on this rinky-dink planet. Whiz-bang. Now. Where the hell is Jesus?

(SAINT PETER doesn't answer)

Pete? Where the hell is Jesus?

SAINT PETER

Well, see, the thing is – the thing is – no one's quite sure where Jesus is.

GOD

No one's quite sure? What the hell does that mean? When's the last time anyone saw him?

SAINT PETER

Well, there was a sighting in a burrito in Mexico City, but that was a while ago.

GOD *(up to the CEILING)*

Calling Jesus!

*(We hear a PHONE RING two or three times, then a voice on the other end:
JESUS. His voice is nearly drowned out by the sounds of a raucous CROWD, as if
JESUS is in a crowded bar.)*

JESUS

Hello! This is Jesus! I aims to please-us!

GOD

Jesus, this is your father.

JESUS *(loudly)*

Who?

(aside)

Just water for me, thanks.

GOD *(yelling)*

The almighty father, damn it!

JESUS

Oh, pop. Hi, um, you're back. What do you know?

GOD

That's right. I'm back. I've got Peter here –

JESUS

Pete! How are the pearly's hangin'?

SAINT PETER

The pearly's are just fine. Everything is fine.

GOD

Peter here's been debriefing me on the festering sore Earth has become under your watch: war, disease, famine, crime, poverty, torture, genocide, Snookie!

(beat, JESUS doesn't answer)

Can you hear me? What's that music?

JESUS *(glumly)*

Mariachi.

GOD

You need to get back here, now! Am I crystal?

(There is silence, then a click.)

Hello? Hello? He hung up on me!

(GOD yells back up to the CEILING.)

Calling Jesus fucking Christ!

(We hear one PHONE RING, then the beep of JESUS' ANSWERING MACHINE.)

JESUS

'Yo. Jesus. Message. Beep.'

GOD

Oh-ho-ho! Now I am biblically pissed. It's incidences like this that send me boiling. See this right here? This is me boiling. I'm boiling huge.

(GOD STANDS and furiously scratches his beard)

God's beard's getting scratchy!

(to SAINT PETER)

My ass is on the fucking line here, P. I'm going to have to make a decision.

(GOD inhales and exhales deeply to try and steady himself)

What do you think? Typhoons? Earthquakes? Volcanoes? What? I could use a little help here, you know! Chime any time!

SAINT PETER

Well, Your Holiness, I'm not quite sure any of those would quite be the best solutions to this problem.

GOD

Ooh! Asteroid! Yeah, that'd do it. I know a guy in the Kuiper Belt. He owes me.

(SAINT PETER does not react to GOD's plan)

What?! What's the matter? Asteroid's perfect.

SAINT PETER

Far be it from me to question Your Holiness's wisdom. . .

GOD

Far be it.

SAINT PETER

I was thinking maybe more along the lines of a good talking to from Your Holiness. This species does have some redeeming qualities. Maybe they could be saved.

GOD

Saved? Did you see the Crusades? The Inquisition? Witch trials? The Holocaust? For shit stain's sake, did you see the Holocaust, Pete?

SAINT PETER

I have. However, maybe salvation for this species is still a possibility.

GOD

And maybe dog shit tastes like pumpkin pie. Doesn't mean I'm dialing up room service for Cool Whip.

(GOD leans back, yells up to the CEILING.)

Not that anyone seems to care what the lord almighty might want in this place.

SAINT PETER

You're thirsty. Let me dial you up that Coke Zero.

GOD

No. Nevermind the Coke Zero. This ends now. I am not putting my holy hiney on the line for these self-aggrandizing, self-important, self-seeking, self-entitled, self-consumed, self-centered flock of narcissistic fuck-ups. These people have pecked through my patience wall. Game, set, match. I'm out. They're done.

SAINT PETER

Let's just take a deep breath. Remember "deep breaths"?

GOD

I don't want to take a deep breath.

SAINT PETER

Now, we both know you just can't go kill everyone down there.

GOD

Why not? Says who?

SAINT PETER

You don't want to be like they are, do you? You want to be bigger than they are, right?

GOD *(calming)*

Well, maybe. I suppose.

GOD (CONT'D)

Wait. Oh, I get it. Yes, yes, yes – I see it now. You don't think I can pull it off, do you? This is a dare. Is this a dare? Are you daring me?

SAINT PETER

I would never question the wisdom of Your Holiness.

GOD

Enough! If you butter me up one more slice of that 'Your Holiness' Bread I'm gonna hit the roof. It's settled. My Asteroid Plan's divine, and we're going with it.

SAINT PETER

That is certainly an option.

GOD

Yes it is, isn't it?

SAINT PETER

But I do wonder what the Galactic Council would say if you suddenly reset the evolutionary dial on one of your field offices back to the land of gnats and rats? Wouldn't exactly be a resume builder, would it?

GOD

I guess. I just wish I could just fire everyone down there. Can't I do that? Wipe this one species out and start fresh? You know: new and improved. Wait. Can I fire everyone?

SAINT PETER

You could.

GOD

Great. Let's fire away.

SAINT PETER

However –

GOD

Ach, you and the "howevers"! I swear. We should start calling you Saint However.

(deep breath, calmer)
All right. Give me the "however".

SAINT PETER

It's true: you can pull the plug. You can up and leave everything and everybody behind.

GOD

Yes! Good! *However!*

SAINT PETER

However, there is a little matter of the DaVinci Clause.

GOD

The who-what, now?

SAINT PETER

The DaVinci Clause. You inserted into the bylaws after you sent Jesus down with the user's manual and the folks in the basement nailed him down and shipped him back. Frankly, we had all but forgotten about it until DaVinci rediscovered it. He's a bit of a nosy noodle, I'll admit. And, it is a rather arcane rule, but it is a rule, nonetheless.

GOD

So it's a rule. So what? I'm the boss. My heavens, my rules. I can do whatever I want.

SAINT PETER (*more frustrated*)

But it's *your* law. You'd be breaking *your own* rules!

GOD

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Tone, Sainty P, tone. God don't cotton to your extra decibels. You feelin' me?

SAINT PETER

Well, I, well I was merely stating. . . I'm sure I didn't mean to, ah – I certainly didn't mean to offend.

GOD

Don't toot in your toga, Stammering Sam. I'm not gonna send you downtown to spend eternity as Satan's snuggle bunny. Although you know I could, just like that.

(GOD snaps his fingers)

And don't you forget it.

(beat)

So, what do we – wait: does my breath smell like nachos?

(GOD releases a lengthy exhale into SAINT PETER's face)

SAINT PETER (*doesn't flinch*)

Quite the contrary. It's heavenly.

GOD

Good.

(yells up to the ceiling)

God doesn't need a Coke Zero! Hear that?

(to SAINT PETER)

So, spill. What exactly do I have to do to get these jack-offs to stop hounding my ass for meaningless crap twenty-four-seven? And give it to me minus the shalt's and shant's and thou's and thee's. I want plain English.

SAINT PETER

Simply put, the DaVinci Clause states that god – that’s you – can abandon the Earth if, and only if, every single inhabitant renounces his faith in your holiness. Not an unsubstantial task.

GOD

Wait. Are you telling me any half-assed schmuck who refuses to stop slinging fifty-cent prayers at me can sink my divine plan and cram my career in the crapper?

SAINT PETER

Everyone has to give up hope. It’s the law. You’re law.

GOD

Oh, yeah? Well, here’s another fact hot off the presses: god’s Divine Plan has changed.

SAINT PETER

Changed?

GOD

You heard me: changed, revised, adjusted, updated and upgraded. God’s new Divine Plan is: “leave god the fuck alone.”

SAINT PETER

I’m sorry. I’m not sure I quite heard you correctly.

GOD

You heard me fine. Unless everyone stops begging me to pull their ass out of the fire one more time, not a single one of them gets their ticket punched to the champagne room. We insert the standard fire-and-brimstone boilerplate – you know: “Anyone who disobeys. . .so sayeth the Lord. . .yada, yada, yada” – and , boom!, we’re done.

(GOD stands and begins visualizing his plan. SAINT PETER doesn’t move.)

Yes, yes, yes. “Leave god alone”. Leave god alone or else. . .or else, what? Or else god will. . .

(GOD turns, sees SAINT PETER)

Are you still here? Go, go, go. Tick, tock. I ain’t Job.

SAINT PETER

Now, your holiness, if I may, changing the Divine Plan is quite a massive undertaking that requires lots of, well, people and chisels and stones. H.R. will have to get involved. It’s rather complicated.

GOD

Which is why you shouldn’t be burdening my ass with idle chit-chat from the wings.

SAINT PETER

Not to mention reversing several thousand years of precedent – precedent you yourself set. Perhaps we should consider more of a velvet glove in place of the iron fist. A firm finger-wag from god could go a long way to forcing people to mend their ways.

GOD

All excellent points, P, but since I seem to recently recall something about a *directive straight from fucking God*, to change the Divine Plan. So, let's defer to his judgment, shall we? Get going. God's got ladders to climb.

SAINT PETER

As you wish.

GOD

We've got to move fast on this. People need to know I mean business. If they won't quit me, they need to know god's ready to crack open a can of ole-fashioned, oh-come-oh-ye-faithful, hell-on-Earth whoop ass.

SAINT PETER

You should know: their faith is strong.

GOD

Fuck that. This is G-Master G, yo. These people are no match for me. When I get done with 'em, they're gonna wish they never heard of me. It's time to stomp the yard!

SAINT PETER

Stomp the –? I'm not quite sure I follow.

GOD

Stomp the yard. . .you know.

SAINT PETER

I'm afraid I don't.

GOD

Neither do I. I picked it up at the conference.

SAINT PETER (*embarrassed for GOD*)

Oh.

GOD

They want us to try and stay relevant.

(*beat*)

Anyway, my point is: 'I'm gonna open up an ice-cream-truck full of hell on earth!

END SCENE ONE

ACT ONE
Scene Two

(LIGHTS UP on INTERIOR of the FERGUSON home. The space is plain: a sagging leather COUCH, a yard-sale T.V. STAND, and wobbly BOOKSHELF fill one space. On the wall above the BOOKSHELF is a framed PORTRAIT OF JESUS. On top of the BOOKSHELF are a group of lit TEA CANDLES. A small KITCHEN TABLE and two CHAIRS occupy the rest of the stage.)

ENTER ISIAH FERGUSON, 20 years old. He has a DUFFEL BAG slung over his shoulder. He drops the bag into the corner. He takes off his JACKET and tries to cover the bag.

He moves to the REFRIGERATOR, pulls out a BEER, pops it open, sits at the KITCHEN TABLE and drinks. After a few beats he takes out his PHONE and sends a TEXT MESSAGE. He moves from the KITCHEN to the LIVING ROOM.)

ISIAH

Let's see:

(He tosses a middle finger at the PORTRAIT OF JESUS.)

fuck you false icon . .

(He wets his fingers, and extinguishes the CANDLES.)

. . .sayonara false hope. . .

(He fishes the REMOTE CONTROL from the COUCH cushions.)

. . .Hola, chattering box of idiots. . .and commence with suburban cherry on top.

(ISIAH raises his BEER in mock toast, then drains it. He aims the REMOTE CONTROL at the TV but is interrupted by a REPLY TEXT. He reads the TEXT, drops the REMOTE and marches over to his SUITCASE. He picks it up, stands for a few beats, then drops it. He goes to the KITCHEN, grabs another BEER, then clicks on the TV and sinks into the COUCH.)

NEWSCASTER

Day thirty seven. The heavens parted again today and god let it be known that, quote, "time was a-tickin'" and that he was prepared – again, quoting here – "to uncork a golden chalice of biblical whup-ass on the human race unless they leave me" – the 'me' being god – "the fuck alone." God also announced he had deleted his Facebook page.

God also announced that he no longer wants to be called god, or heavenly father, or your holiness, or supreme being. Instead he now wants to be called Joe – ordinary, bar-stool-cratering 'Joe'.

On the domestic front, the Bible Belt got a biblical bitch slap today when busloads of nuns, orphans and abandoned puppies simultaneously slammed into the remaining churches below the Mason-Dixon line, burning them all to the ground. The cause of these crashes is – well, I mean, seriously: do we really need to ask that question anymore?

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

In international news – Pope-Elect Mel Gibson was the sixth pontiff-to-be struck down in the last six days. Gibson was beset by a series of horrific boils. The weather forecast for Rome tomorrow calls for hail with heavy downpours of locusts.

ISIAH (*screams to the CEILING*)

Why don't you show your face? Coward!

NEWSCASTER

On a more conciliatory note, god did express his gratitude for the dramatic decline in prayers – and, again, these are god's words: “. . . people beseeching me for random, useless crap and personal bullshit favors.”

(We hear the rattle of the key in the FRONT DOOR LOCK. ISIAH quickly moves to take his bag off stage, but as the door opens, the best he can do is cover it with his JACKET.

ENTER ISIAH'S MOTHER, REBECCA, mid 50s, and a bit hunched from carrying the world on her shoulders. She wears a ROSARY around her neck, and she is carrying TAKE-OUT FOOD in plastic bags.)

REBECCA

I've got food.

ISIAH

Please don't tell me it's –

REBECCA

Arby's.

ISIAH

Again? How is that possible?

REBECCA

It's the best I could do. It's Armageddon out there. Arby's is the only place where there's never a line.

ISIAH

Speaking of Armageddon: did you hear today's global warning?

REBECCA

No, and I don't want to.

ISIAH

It's a good one. Ooh, wait. They're gonna replay it again right now.

REBECCA

Turn that off.

ISIAH

C'mon! It's a good one! Mel Gibson gets boils!

REBECCA

I said turn it off, mister.

ISIAH

Fine.

(ISIAH clicks off the TELEVISION)

Click. Happy?

REBECCA

What's going on here?

ISIAH

What?

REBECCA

You look strange. Like you're up to something. What is it?

ISIAH

I'm fine. Everything's. . .fine.

REBECCA

Is that a beer you're drinking?

ISIAH

Yeah, so?

REBECCA

We talked about this. You are not twenty one, young man. Rules are rules.

(ISIAH tries to slug the BEER down; REBECCA rips it away from him.)

Did you snuff out my candles?

ISIAH

Snuff? No. They must've, whatchamacallit, died on their own.

REBECCA

Good thing I picked up more. Here.

(She hands ISIAH a bag of TEA CANDLES)

Put these new ones in and light them.

*(ISIAH places the CANDLES on the BOOKSHELF but doesn't light them.
REBECCA sets the table.)*

ISIAH

I don't know why we keep doing this. It's a total waste of time.

REBECCA

Please don't ruin dinner.

ISIAH

It's Arby's. It comes pre-ruined.

*(They sit, and REBECCA extends her hands to ISIAH to pray. ISIAH keeps his
hands at his side.)*

REBECCA

We're going to pray. Now give me your hands.

(ISIAH hesitates.)

Isiah Ferguson! Give me your hands!

*(ISIAH reluctantly extends his hands to REBECCA. She takes them and starts to
bow her head in prayer but stops short and flips ISIAH's hands over.)*

What's this?

ISIAH

Nothing.

REBECCA

A tattoo? Don't you know that's the stupidest thing you can do? That's a mark you'll carry with you for the rest of your life.

ISIAH

Which – based on god's hissy-fit rate – should be about a week, give or take a plague.

REBECCA

Is that a horseshoe?

ISIAH

You've got rosary beads, I've got a horseshoe. What's the difference?

REBECCA

Why would you do such a thing?

ISIAH

Ever since god's clipped the leash, everyone's doing whatever they want. This is what I want.

REBECCA

Branding yourself with some superstitious symbol?

(ISIAH thumbs the ROSARY around REBECCA'S neck)

ISIAH

Pot calling kettle. Pot calling kettle. Come in, kettle.

REBECCA

What's gotten into you? Tattoos? Talking back? You can do better. I know you can.

ISIAH

For the first time I'm doing what I actually want. No one judging me. No one left on heaven and Earth cares. Why should I?

REBECCA

I care.

ISIAH

You shouldn't. How much more evidence do you need?

REBECCA

All this is a test. God is simply testing us. Testing our ability to believe in him.

(ISIAH LAUGHS)

He is!

ISIAH

You should be happy, ma. You used to have to die to know if you punched your Holy Roller ticket. Now all you have to do is flip on CNN to know what an asshole the attic dweller thinks you are.

REBECCA

That is enough!

ISIAH

It's not personal. Everyone's an asshole in his eyes. The only mystery left down here is why you're trying so hard to cozy up to the Holy Snubber.

REBECCA

I haven't given up hope.

ISIAH

Hope's a Tickle-Me-Elmo, mom. No one has it anymore. Give up. Everyone else has.

REBECCA

Maybe they've abandoned hope. But I can't. I won't. Just because we don't understand god's ways doesn't mean we should surrender. We're going to do what's right and pray.

(REBECCA takes ISIAH's hands)

Our father, who art in heaven. . .

ISIAH

Six popes dead, let's make it seven.

REBECCA

That's enough! As long as you live in this house, you will show some respect for the lord.

ISIAH

What are we even doing? You don't have to pray anymore. It's official: god hates us.

REBECCA

And I know I don't *have* to pray. I *want* to. And god does not hate us.

ISIAH

He just announced it on CNN! How many more popes and puppies does this guy have to put the pillow over before you figure it out?

REBECCA

Well, he didn't mean it. He was having a bad day.

ISIAH

Thirty seven straight?

REBECCA

He was –

ISIAH

Please don't say "testing us." You're worse than the Emergency Broadcast System.

REBECCA

Isiah, I have to believe in something bigger – grander – than myself. You should, too. If you can't have faith in a nobler purpose, what's the point of living?

ISIAH

Believing in yourself sounds like a fresh start.

REBECCA

Don't sass.

ISIAH

Mystery's over, ma. The Invisible Man behind the cumulous curtain has spent the last thirty-seven days pounding our toes with a ball peen hammer every time we try to spiritually spoon. God's not grand. He's not noble. He's just an old grump who wants us to get off his fucking lawn. When are you going to believe your own eyes and leave him alone?

REBECCA

What did I just say about language? I experienced an awakening through god. *That* was real. *He* was real.

ISIAH

You know what you are? You're a sinner.

REBECCA

I am no such thing. I am a devoted and faithful servant of the lord.

ISIAH

God's telling you to leave him alone, to stop believing in him – and you're straight up disobeying a direct order. You're the poster child for the Eternal-Damnation three-cent stamp.

REBECCA

Maybe god is confused. Maybe he's –

ISIAH

Testing us. Right.

REBECCA

I know this is hard, but god is challenging us to find our moral center, Isiah. We can't abandon our morals. We can't abandon god. I won't let you.

ISIAH

God's slurped down your devotion and vomited scotch all over it. But instead of letting go, you cling tighter. That's the definition of insanity.

REBECCA

That's not true. None of that's true. God rewards the faithful.

ISIAH

He does? Really? Where's your evidence?

REBECCA

You want black-and-white answers for god's actions? I don't have any. My faith is my answer.

ISIAH

More like your excuse for inviting people in and letting them leave their footprints all over you. I mean, holy shit! How much more is it going to take?

(REBECCA slaps ISIAH)

Oh, that's right: I forgot. Shit's not allowed to be holy anymore. I'm going out.

REBECCA

No. Please. Don't. I'm sorry. Stay. Let's eat, OK?

(ISIAH doesn't move.)

I'm doing the best I can. You know that, right? I'm just so alone.

(beat)

Sometimes I wonder what your father would do if he was still here.

ISIAH

What he does best: hit and run.

REBECCA

I never let him hit you. Never!

ISIAH

No, his arms were too tired.

REBECCA

I protected you. I've always protected you.

ISIAH

I know. I'm not blaming you for what he did.

REBECCA

Can't we just forget the past? Times were different. *We* were different. There was no cause and effect or consequence. All there was was action and reaction. You wouldn't understand.

ISIAH

Don't defend him.

REBECCA

It wasn't all his fault.

ISIAH

It wasn't yours at all. You know that, right?

(REBECCA doesn't answer.)

Right?

(REBECCA nods silently)

I tell you one thing – I'm gonna find him one day, and he's gonna star in his own little come-to-Jesus show for what he did to you. For everything.

REBECCA

Don't. Please. He's already paid.

ISIAH

I don't mean in god's eyes. I'm talking about in the real world.

REBECCA

We just need to stick together, OK? I just can't have you walk out the door right now. I can't do all this alone.

ISIAH

You're not alone. I just – I just don't get it. Why are you consumed with this burning need to have god tell you you matter? You matter to *me*. Doesn't that matter?

REBECCA

Of course it does. We just need god's help more than ever right now – to keep us together, be a family. OK?

ISIAH

Family. Sure. Fine. Man, that roast beef reeks. We better eat it before it wakes up and goes after our brains.

REBECCA

Promise me we'll do that: stick together. Be a family.

ISIAH

Eat your processed meat parts, ma.

(ISIAH takes a bite of his sandwich and almost immediately spits it out.)

Oh, man. *This* sandwich is the original sin.

REBECCA

Try and eat.

(ISIAH takes another bite and swallows it down with effort.)

ISIAH

This really needs a beer chaser.

(REBECCA pauses, then motions to the REFRIGERATOR. ISIAH leaps up with a smile, kisses REBECCA on the head, and grabs a beer. He opens it, takes a deep pull, then sits back at the table.)

REBECCA

I do for you, now you do for me?

ISIAH

This sounds like a “mom trap”. “Do for you” like what?

REBECCA

Try and have a little faith? For me?

ISIAH

Sure, mom. For you, I'll wear the blindfold and walk the plank.

REBECCA

That's my boy.

ISIAH

As long as we're on this doing-for-each-other kick, how about you do for me and go down to the Sev-Lev and pick me up a twelver? "Come to me, all you who suffer and are burdened and I will refresh you."

REBECCA

Whoa-ho-ho! Matthew Eleven-Twenty Eight! Someone still heeds the word of the lord.

ISIAH

Osmosis.

REBECCA

See? Religion can bring people comfort.

ISIAH

So can morphine.

UMBER (*OFF STAGE*)

Ding-dong! Umber calling!

REBECCA

What's that? Who's there?

ISIAH (*to UMBER*)

Hold on a minute!

(*ISIAH takes another bite and drains the rest of his beer.*)

Well, I'm out.

REBECCA

Out? Out where? With who?

ISIAH

Umber.

REBECCA

Umber? Who's that?

ISIAH

Umber is – I don't know, Umber.

REBECCA

That's a strange name.

ISIAH

It's not his real name. We just call him that 'cuz he likes to shoot stuff with his paint gun. You know: paint, colors – Umber.

UMBER (O/S)

What light through yonder window be breakin'? I'm comin' straight from Arby's and my belly be achin'.

REBECCA

I don't like the sound of this Umber person. And you should not be hanging around people who carry guns.

ISIAH

You cling to religion, he clings to guns. Your faith might be bulletproof; people aren't.

UMBER (O/S)

Double, double, toil and trouble. They call me Freddy Flintstone 'cuz I likes to break rubble.

ISIAH (to UMBER)

I said, hang on!

REBECCA

Tell him to come in. I want to meet the people you're associating with.

ISIAH

Not possible. He doesn't like to talk to, well, actual people.

UMBER (O/S)

Mine's an idiot's tale; it's full of sound and fury. I woulda been convicted 'cept I got me a hung jury.

REBECCA

Why don't you come to my prayer meeting instead? I'll buy you one of those tall beers – the ones with the extra ounces.

ISIAH

Tempting, but your world's up there, mom. Mine's out there. Look, Umber's waiting.
(*ISIAH kisses REBECCA on the cheek.*)

And can you not hold your meeting here? Last time it smelled like baby powder and cat litter in here for a week.

REBECCA

It doesn't matter. There's only two of us now.

ISIAH

Where'd everyone go?

REBECCA

Away. They've all given up hope.

ISIAH

Not hope – faith. In him. Like everyone else.

(beat)

So, who's the sole survivor from your Lick-the-God-Toad Holy-Roller team?

REBECCA

Oh, uh, you don't know her.

ISIAH

Mom, there are, like, fifty people in this town.

(REBECCA mumbles an inaudible name)

ISIAH

Who?

REBECCA *(steadies herself for mockery)*

Jean Darcy.

ISIAH

Jean -- ? The lady who screams at invisible helicopters? Holy – I thought the Army's recruitment standards were low.

REBECCA

OK. Ha-ha-ha. It's all very funny. Now, I'll admit: Jean's a little. . .eccentric.

ISIAH

You and the Helicopter Whisperer! Wow. Not looking good for your side, mom. Although, I guess, on the bright side, if an episode of M*A*S*H breaks out, you're covered.

UMBER

Seriously, man, let's go! My Shakespeare lake's dry, god's ragin' and I'm freezing my weenus off.

REBECCA

I suppose pretty soon it'll just be me. Alone.

ISIAH

You're not alone. You still have me. I'm not going anywhere. OK?

REBECCA

I worry about you – out there on your own.

ISIAH

Don't worry about me. I've got company.

REBECCA

But I do worry. It's just that we – your father and I – we always knew you were a little bit, well, different.

ISIAH

You say it like I'm contagious.

REBECCA

More sensitive, I mean, and it's just that it's so violent out there now.

ISIAH

First of all, I'm a man. I know how to protect myself. And, second, I couldn't give a shit what any other father I'm supposed to take after has to say about me.

REBECCA

Please don't swear.

ISIAH

Why not? It's just me being different. I gotta go.

(ISIAH turns to EXITS; stops)

You know, if you keep doing this he'll find you.

REBECCA

Keep doing what?

ISIAH

Praying. If you keep praying, he'll find you. No matter what. He won't stop.

REBECCA

That's why I pray. I *want* him to find me.

ISIAH

Well, don't pray for me. I don't want any blood on my hands. I'll see you later.

REBECCA

OK. Go. But don't forget, my big man, but you'll always be my little boy.

(ISIAH starts to EXIT)

REBECCA (CONT'D)

And remember: eleven o'clock, mister. Not a minute after.

ISIAH

I know, I know. Eleven on the dot. Don't worry. I'll be back before your second ring around the rosaries.

(ISIAH EXITS. REBECCA takes her ROSARY from around her neck. It slips and drops to the floor. She picks it up and begins to thumb through it in prayer.)

LIGHTS OUT

END SCENE TWO

ACT ONE
Scene Three

(LIGHTS UP in HEAVEN. GOD is at his DESK, nose deep in PILES OF PAPER. The perimeter of his desk is lined with cans of DIET CHERRY VANILLA DR. PEPPER. SAINT PETER ENTERS UPSTAGE, tiptoeing behind GOD, hoping to go unnoticed. He reaches halfway across the stage, when GOD calls back to him, without turning around.)

GOD

They're trying to push me out, Pea-Pod. I can feel it. You see this?

(GOD holds up a PIECE OF PAPER, doesn't turn around)

Memo from the Galactic Council. They're sending an angel out to check up on me. Says they've been hearing rumors that I've lost control. Not from you, I hope.

SAINT PETER

No, I would never. . . I didn't think you knew I was back here.

GOD

Joe sees all. Heads up. Doctor Pepper: incoming.

(GOD flips one of the DOCTOR PEPPERS over his shoulder to SAINT PETER.

SAINT PETER juggles the can then drops it. He remains standing behind GOD, who does not turn to speak to him.)

Nice hands.

SAINT PETER

What happened to your Coke Zero?

GOD

Mysterious shortage. Heaven's official drink has suddenly dried up. Curious, don't you think?

SAINT PETER

I couldn't say.

GOD

Drink up.

SAINT PETER

My can might be a bit shaken up. Perhaps it would be best if I wait until –

GOD

Are you disobeying a direct order from Joe?

(SAINT PETER opens the DOCTOR PEPPER, which explodes across his ROBE.

GOD chuckles; SAINT PETER takes a sip and shudders.)

SAINT PETER

Mmm. Refreshing.

GOD

Don't bullshit a creator. This witch's brew is high-fructose hemlock.

SAINT PETER

Yes, Your Holiness.

GOD

Hup! Tut-tut!

SAINT PETER (sighs)

I mean: *Joe*.

GOD

That's better. Isn't that better? I think it's better. Joe. "Oh hi, Joe! Would you like a cup of joe, Joe? Oh, I don't know! I suppose so! Ho, ho, ho!"

SAINT PETER

Yes. Very nice. Very. . .melodic, your holy -. Very melodic, Joe.

GOD

You'll get used to it. You can get used to anything. Just like those people down there'll get used to me not being around anymore. Speaking of which: am I almost clear of that den of iniquity, or what?

SAINT PETER

Not quite.

GOD

I don't pay you for "not quite". I pay you for "case Ziploc-closed-Joe, don't-you-worry, thank-you-very-much-next-assignment, please." Understood?

SAINT PETER

Understood.

GOD (*holds up a small stack of papers.*)

You see these? These are *prayers*. Prayers to me, P. These people spend all their time wondering what Jesus would do, but when I shove their faces in it, they suddenly want to see my badge. What gives?

SAINT PETER

It seems there are a determined few – albeit dwindling in number – who refuse to believe you've abandon them.

GOD

Abandon? I'm opening doors! Dishing out keys! Nuzzling them up to the teat of enlightenment! Empowering them to suckle on free will, empirical knowledge, deductive reasoning, rational analysis, truth and nature and self realization. These people should be thanking me.

SAINT PETER

When they're done plummeting off cliffs, I'm sure they'll send a card.

GOD

Don't get snippy. These people have done enough damage with me on the marquee.

SAINT PETER

The fact remains that you have disciples – I know you think they're delusional – who still revere the ground you walk on. They believe in your goodness and fairness and wisdom. They refuse to be dissuaded.

GOD

So dissuade harder.

SAINT PETER

Now, Joe, you know I enjoy a good smiting as much as the next fellow, but I think enough may be enough. Your point has been made. The people on earth have been sufficiently humbled.

GOD

No. Not enough. I need them off the balance sheet completely. The Galactic Council can never know they existed. The sooner they forget about me, the sooner I forget about them, the happier everyone in heaven and earth will be.

(beat)

Wait, you're not feeling sorry for these people, are you?

SAINT PETER

Well. . .

GOD

You're such a softie. Once these people learn that salvation comes at the end of their fingertips and not at the end of some bright light, the better off we'll all be.

SAINT PETER

They're not all like that. These people worship you.

GOD

Worship. Please. They want return on investment. They don't help that old lady across the street because they want to.

GOD (CONT'D)

They do it because they hope someone up here with a checklist and a set of binoculars is keeping score. "Check it out, god. See what I'm doin' here? Not bad, huh?" Then they go into the office and scam that same old bitty out of the last quarter in her coffee can.

SAINT PETER

You're not the Joe I remember.

GOD

Well, the Joe you know's got seven days before the angels descend from the Council, which means you've got three. So that means less gum flappin' and more whip crackin', and you quell this reb-bell mach schnell.

SAINT PETER

I'll do my best.

GOD

Yeah, well, from my seat it looks like you're "I'll-do-my-best knife" ain't makin' it through the mustard. Either you locate these faithful few and show them the wrath of Joe, or I'll be making some changes up here. Compende?

SAINT PETER

Understood.

GOD

I'm going to get you some help. We need to push the accelerator.

(GOD looks up to the ceiling)

Calling Jesus.

SAINT PETER

No, no, no! I'll do it. I'll pull a few pages from the Middle Ages. Thy will will be done.

(ENTER JESUS, eating a GRILLED CHEESE and drinking a COKE ZERO. He's dressed like a centerfold from the HIPSTER CATALOGUE: Chuck Taylor sneakers, factory-distressed jeans, proper-length chin whiskes, ironic sunglasses, and mandatory hat wear—a sporty fedora. His T-shirt reads: I'm My Co-Pilot.)

JESUS (to GOD)

Yahweh! Whaddya say?

(to SAINT PETER)

Peter the Greeter!

(JESUS extends his hand to SAINT PETER, who goes to shake it, but JESUS pulls his hand away at the last moment.)

Yoink! Oldest one in the good book! Sap alert!

GOD

Where did you get that?

(JESUS holds up the GRILLED CHEESE)

JESUS

Momma T just burned one up for me. Not as good as down “planet way”, but I don’t know – I can’t get enough of these grillies!

(leans in to SAINT PETER)

And great for soaking up a wine hangover. Man, did we go at it hard last night.

GOD

Not that.

(points to COKE ZERO)

That!

JESUS

This? Stockroom. There’s about a thousand cases in there.

(JESUS drains the COKE ZERO and crushes the empty can.)

GOD

A thousand?! Where the hell have you been?

JESUS

Dark side of the moon. Chillin’. What? What’s with all the furrowed brows?

GOD

I need you to go to earth.

JESUS

No problem. Savior loves a soiree.

GOD

In human form.

JESUS

What? Whoa. No! Why?

GOD

Saint Peter needs help.

JESUS

The gate keeper? C’mon. No, he doesn’t. Do you, Pete?

SAINT PETER

No, I don’t.

JESUS

See? He doesn't need help. Besides, these people go goo-goo gaga when they see me in a potato. If I show up in the flesh, things could get ugly.

SAINT PETER

Your father's already seen to that.

JESUS

What's that supposed to mean?

SAINT PETER

Your father has given up on Earth.

JESUS

Given up? Get outta here. You haven't given up on anybody, have you, Pop?

GOD

Given, gave, gone.

SAINT PETER

Your father has decided that the people of Earth have become an intractable burr in his all-powerful and ever-living saddle – a rotted ladder riddled with rungs of rusty nails impeding his climb to corporate success; a steaming cow patty on the verdant interstellar pasture.

JESUS

I get the picture.

SAINT PETER

A gush of oil in the pristine ocean of existence; a plastic bag clinging to a thorn in the galactic rose garden of mankind. A –

GOD

He said he gets the picture.

SAINT PETER

So, in your father's quest for the brass ring, he has made the decision to abandon the people on earth.

JESUS

Abandon! You can't do that! Those people are cool, pop!

GOD

They are no such thing. While you've been partying I've been busting my hump to make this galaxy shine, and that place is a grass stain on silk.

SAINT PETER

But to abandon that planet, he must first extinguish every inhabitant's faith in him.

JESUS

Extinguish? Why?

SAINT PETER

To get a promotion from the Galactic Council.

GOD

To get what I deserve!

JESUS

For a promotion?

GOD

Joe works in mysterious ways.

JESUS

Joe? Joe who?

SAINT PETER

Long story.

JESUS

I'm confused.

GOD

Those vile vermin have placed my face on their toilet paper for far too long. They must be cast out of my Excel spreadsheet. Forever!

JESUS

That's not true! And not for nothin', but a lot of 'em really have a thing for you. How about just, maybe, scaring them a little?

GOD

No! The fear of Joe is not enough. Their column in the spreadsheet of my existence must be reduced to zero. Now, I need you to descend and deal-seal. Pete's got the deets.

(JESUS and SAINT PETER look at each other, confused. GOD sighs.)

Details. Pete has the details.

JESUS

I literally hung myself on a limb for these people, pop. You can't just up and leave them. What you're doing – it's immoral. It's unethical.

GOD

Spare me the sentimental histrionics. I'm on deadline, which means you're on deadline – the both of you. Now, go, or I'll have you both scrubbing poop stains out of Port-a-Potties in purgatory.

(GOD'S PHONE rings. He fumbles for it inside his robe, then pulls it out and reads the CALLER I.D.)

Oh, great. Let the ball busting begin. What could this asshole possibly want now?

(into phone)

Hello? What? No, I wasn't calling you an asshole. I would never do that.

(beat)

How's that? You're coming here? What a surprise. We'll have the Pearly Gates so shiny you'll be able to see your previous life.

(beat)

Yes, I'm crunching the numbers right now.

(covers PHONE with his hand)

Don't forsake me Jesus.

(GOD moves upstage, continuing his conversation)

JESUS

He's never gonna let me live that down.

GOD

And take off that hat. You look like a damn fool.

JESUS *(to SAINT PETER)*

That was unnecessarily harsh. You like the hat, don't you, Pete?

SAINT PETER

No.

JESUS

Whaddya mean, no?

SAINT PETER

You're Jesus. People are supposed to follow *you*.

JESUS

This whole going-to-Earth thing doesn't feel right, Pete.

SAINT PETER

What choice do we have?

JESUS

What should we do?

SAINT PETER

The real front-burner question is what would you do?

JESUS

What can I do? My father has spoken.

SAINT PETER

Then we must obey.

(JESUS and SAINT PETER EXIT)

LIGHTS OUT

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO
Scene One

(A DOOR FRAME divides the stage. On one side is ISIAH, sitting alone at his KITCHEN TABLE, writing a note. An ARBY'S sandwich sits off to the side. He quickly finishes writing, gives the note a quick read, then folds it into an ENVELOPE. He twirls the ENVELOPE a few times, then puts it down and takes a bite of the sandwich. He spits it out almost immediately.)

ISIAH

Jesus. How do these people sleep at night?

(ISIAH spins the note around a few more times. JESUS and SAINT PETER ENTER. SAINT PETER holds a CLIPBOARD and has a PEN tucked behind his ear. It has been a long trip, and the wear and tear on the two shows. SAINT PETER flips through the papers on the CLIPBOARD and motions to the door.)

SAINT PETER

This is it. Last one. Jesus, has this been a long day, or what?

(beat)

Jesus?

JESUS

Hmm? What? Oh, yeah. Man, wave a few dollar signs and H-D big screens in front of those Born Agains and they cave right in, don't they?

SAINT PETER

They do get grabby for the cash, yes. Everyone seems to have a number. Thank Joe this is it: the last one.

JESUS

I wonder how many commas and zeroes there are in this Eve's apple.

(SAINT PETER knocks on the DOOR. ISIAH bolts up in shock, spilling the contents of his sandwich across the table. He struggles to silently control his rage and crunches the sandwich into a ball. He sticks the note in his back pocket, then walks to the DOOR trying not to wake REBECCA.)

ISIAH

Who is it? Who's there?

JESUS

It's Jesus.

SAINT PETER

And Saint Peter.