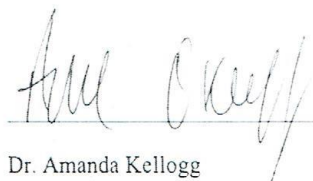


The Write-In
by
Nick McCord

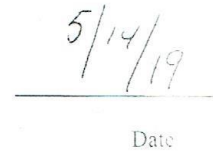
A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Amanda Kellogg
May 2019

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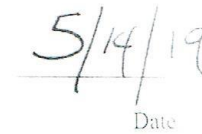
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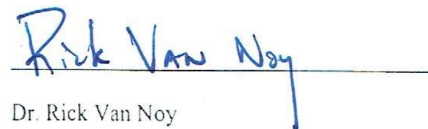
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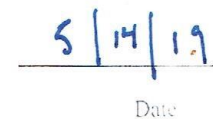
Dr. Moira Baker
Committee Member



Date



Dr. Rick Van Noy
Committee Member



Date

The Write-In

A Play

By Nick McCord

“Every election has a dark horse candidate. Whether or not they ride with the apocalypse... well.”

SYNOPSIS

When voters choose “Jesus Christ” as the write-in candidate for a city council seat, murder, mayhem and an unruly flock of celestial icons descend on Davy County, North Carolina, spurring one woman to downright transcend her role as ballot-counting election official.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARCY SPIEL: Late 30s, early 40s; female. Appalachian accent.

Faithful chosen, election official, and lawn care volunteer at Holy Brotherhood Communion of Faith Chapel.

ED HOPPS/JESUSY ED/ZOMBIE ED/ED: Late 40s, early 50s; male. Appalachian accent. Sitting city counselor, and good-ol’ boy.

SHARON KING: Late 40s, early 50s; female. Southern accent. Lush with a lust for life, pastries, Billy Ray Cyrus.

PASTOR MEREDITH: 40s; female. Devoted pastor, closeted gay woman, trailblazer.

CONGREGATION: A disembodied flock of voices. Maybe the audience too.

TERRENCE FORD: 20s, or 30s; male. Southern accent/No accent. Medicated schizophrenic, and Bi-Lo employee on perennial final written warning.

MARILYN MONROE: 30s; female. Deceased star of stage and screen. Fire and rhinestones.

GINA SPIEL: 17; female. Non-regional accent. Gen-Z teen with an appreciation for the subtleties of screamo.

ROY SPIEL/MAN: Late 30s, early 40s; male. Appalachian accent. One of the town cops. Loves his family. As “MAN” A Stanford Creative Writing Professor.

BETTY CROCKER: Early 40s; female. A non-regional accent. The celestial matron of baked goods. Herself, baked on tranquilizers.

PAUL WYLER/JESUSY PAUL/BILLY V.O.: Early 40s; male. Southern accent. Clean-cut heir to the Wyler’s Grape Juice fortune, political rival to Ed Hopps.

SETTING:

Davy County, a small, authentic hamlet in North Carolina speckled with a high number of Cracker Barrel restaurants.

TIME:

Outside the time and space of a divisive national election, but similar in tone and now-ish-ness.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION:

Colorblind casting is encouraged.

Despite elaboration on staging written into the stage directions, the playwright encourages the use of black box theatre.

AUTHOR BIO

Nick McCord is an actor/playwright from Seattle, Washington, and writer of plays *Good Night*, *Good Doctor*, *The Blooming Season*, *Dirty Dirt* and his one-man show, *The Boy is Clearly Imbalanced*. Nick is a proud member of The Dramatists Guild and the New Play Exchange.

ACT I

SCENE 1: DAVY COUNTY EXTENSION SCHOOL

EARLY SOME MORNING

Lights up on MARCY SPIEL with her head in her hands, alone in a high school classroom. The chalkboard behind her reads: “Welcome to Davy High” in a textbook cursive. An opened ballot box. A pair of screws and a screw driver rest on top of the Davy County Election Rules and Regulations. A pile of ballots to left and right and center of Marcy, counted and sorted in neat piles, with one noticeably larger. A brass stamper, such as one might use to validate ballots, about six inches high, sits next to a mini-strongbox on the corner of the table.

MARCY

(murmuring) Oh Lord Jesus, please give me guidance; please give me faith. And not a spirit of fear but wisdom- to do the right thing, cause I know you-

ED HOPPS enters from Left, in dress pants and shirt, with a loosened tie. From his back pocket hangs a handkerchief with oil stains.

ED

Marcy?

MARCY

Oh Ed! Oh, Ed thank goodness you're here!

ED

What's goin on?

MARCY

Well... oh boy. You know how you said to give you a holler if anything went south? Well, Ed we've got a fix.

ED

A fix?

MARCY

Yes sir.

ED

What kinda fix we talkin about Marcy?

MARCY

Grade A. I was countin' ballots here, Ed, as is my job, and- I swear I hadn't gotten two slips in 'fore, well- 'fore

ED

Fore what, Marcy? You're making me nervous.

MARCY

There were write-ins, Ed.

ED

Write-ins?

MARCY

Yessir. Write-ins.

ED

Well Marce, that ain't uncommon- specially for a council seat. We've had write-ins every year- you know the drill. Some doofus out in the sticks gets a wild hair, thinks Donald Duck'd make a finer comptroller than Ernie ever would, (*leaning in to her*) an he's probably right, but, but sweetheart, that's just part a the game. Y'know? We caint have a representative democracy without all the idjits bein heard too, even if their candidate a choice is a Disney character.

MARCY

Well, uh, I know Ed. But it's not like that.

ED

Whaddo you mean "not like that?"

MARCY

Ed. Ed, they're all the same.

Ed looks puzzled.

MARCY

At first I thought it was a joke, but after the fourth or fifth one, I think they mean it. Look.

She hands him one of the slips from the larger pile.

ED

Jesus.

MARCY

Yes, sir. Jesus. All of em. All write-ins. Some of em tack on Christ too, but I think we can assume they're meaning the same person.

ED

What?

MARCY

At last count there were three hundred thirty-four. All for Jesus or Jesus Christ. And one for Donald Duck, but that's Terrence Ford and he's on meds.

ED

Marcy, this is the Davy County council seat we're talkin about here. This is *my* council seat we're talkin about.

MARCY

I know Ed, that's why I called you straight away.

ED

Well not *straight away* else they wouldn't all been counted. It's my *job*, Marcy, I'm running to stay employed here. Jesus.

MARCY

(*off of "Jesus"*) Yes sir. Every one. And I know how strange it seems, but Ed, I checked and double checked each slip. They're all unique, Ed. I mean, they're legitimate ballots- as far as the rule book goes. But I think I found a clue, cause you know, people gotta sign in to vote, and look, Ed (showing him) here's Delores McCleary, Tony Spivek, Grace Chaplain, this is- this is all First Baptist. The whole congregation, Ed. (more slips) And Second Baptist. The Methodist church, Episcopalians- It ain't a joke, I don't think. Look, I even got a pile of Presbyterians an they're serious as a heart attack.

ED

Alright.

MARCY

You know, Ed, I been praying about it and best I can see, the folks of Davy just decided- uh, to take a stand, Ed. You know?

And I don't think it's a knock on you or Paul Wyler, cause you're both uh, qualified and fine upstanding men who'd equally be just, you know, the right choice to steer Davy country clear of the Muslim menace an' the liberals. But I think- I think maybe all the churches, you know, 'cept ours- just got tired a all the politcal jibberjabber an backtalk you an' Paul been havin' an maybe, well maybe they all figured there was just one- (*gulp*) one man for the job.

ED

Marcy. Honey. You know I'm a religious man.

MARCY

Well of course Ed, you confirmed my Gina.

ED

That I did. That I did. And you know that this entire campaign, Marcy, that it's comin out of my pocket.

MARCY

Oh, Ed.

ED

Every dime, Marcy. Every single one. Every poster, every picket sign, every 'Leap back to the good ol' days with Ed Hopps' beer coozie-

MARCY

They're very clever, Ed.

ED

I *pay* for them! You know those three town halls I had? We got microphones, we got A/C runnin', we got the sound guy- You know how much it costs to rent a venue, Marcy? In *this* town?

MARCY

Well I can't imagine.

ED

I don't *got* Paul Wyler money, Marcy. I ain't him. Some gi-normous grape juice fortune to rent motorcoaches, buy t-shirts, throw *parades*. Honey, it's all my pocketbook. My *savings*. Period. It's my *wallet*, Marcy. And I don't mind tellin' ya, that sucker's fulla flies right about now.

Beat.

MARCY

Well- I didn't know what to do, Ed.

ED

It's fine, I'm not angry, honey. You doin yer duty. And doin a fine job of it. S'just, what're we gonna do? You an me. Bout this- prank.

MARCY

Well, I-

ED

You know, you know, cause we caint really be seriously indulging some silly little gag. A whim. A-It's all antics, Marcy, is all it is. Just a couple people foolin' us. Havin fun.

MARCY

It's over three hundred people Ed.

ED

Three hundred people in on a *joke* Marcy. They're just havin' a laugh.

MARCY

I don' know Ed. I mean, you know. I prayed about it too. An maybe they're right. I mean, you did a great job an all, Ed, you really did, but there was a lotta talk about-

ED

A lotta talk?

MARCY

Yessir. About you know. Scandal.

ED

Scandal.

MARCY

You know, you and that... girl. The one from Appalachian State.

ED

You listenin' to them Wyler smear ads? Are you serious!?

MARCY

My Roy was the arresting officer Ed. We know she wasn't-

ED

I am aware, Marcy, of my history with the Davy P.D., thank you very much. I-You tell me you ain't never had a moment of.. Of weakness? Marcy? You never lusted after no one? You never called another woman something 'hind her back, or- cursed a neighbor in your heart? I am a sinner, Marcy, I know it, and I know I screwed up, I admit to that. Hell, If we're throwing *stones*, Marcy, I'm an easy target. But a *willing* one.

MARCY

I'm sorry Ed- I didn't mean to call you out, I'm just-

ED

Marcy. Marcy. Look at me. Look me in the eye. Ed Hopps. Who you known your whole life. We broke bread together, honey. Bought you that Guinzu knife set atcher wedding. Remember? Cuts right through a penny. You know Edward Hollis Hopps- Deacon of the Holy Brotherhood Communion of Faith Chapel- a sinner, yes! Absolutely, yes indeed. But no less a man. I confirmed yer little girl, Marcy. You said that yourself.

MARCY

Ye-yes you did Ed.

ED

We sing in choir together. Now, not always on key-

She smiles

ED

But always- *together*. Right? In harmony? Like God wants us to be?

MARCY

I just-

ED

What, Marcy? You just what?

MARCY

I just- they're legitimate ballots Ed. And per the election handbook, a majority write-in candidate is either-

ED

Did he put you up to this?

MARCY

Who?

ED

Paul Wyler.

MARCY

Of course not. I don't even know Paul outside his TV commercials.

ED

(under his breath) TV commercials-

MARCY

But I have a responsibility as an election official to-

ED

A responsibility?

MARCY

To... to... accurately report the outcome of the-

ED

Accurately? You think these ballots are *accurate*? *Accurate*? We caint elect *God*, Marcy.

MARCY

I don't know what to do Ed!

ED

You throw em out, is what you do! Gimme the trash bin-

MARCY

I cain't throw em out! They're *ballots*! Official election tender!

ED

Well- clearly not real ones! It's a prank, Marcy! A goddamn prank! Look, let's break it down. Okay? Who's runnin' for council seat? Me an Paul Wyler. D'you see our names on them ballots?!? Do you?

MARCY

He's the lord though, Ed. I mean, he's the *LORD*.

ED

Have you plum flipped your lid? *Jesus* is not going to balance the transportation budget!

MARCY

Maybe we should just wait for the commissioner. This is- It's a legal matter.

ED

Did you call him already?

Marcy packs the ballots into the strongbox.

MARCY

No. I just called you. Because like you said... we're friends. And I know Jesus can't be city councilor; I'm sure he's got just oodles to do up in heaven keepin the angels in line and bein holy and lookin after babies in Africa. But I just- I am *beset at all sides* Ed, and I know we're 'sposed to be spiritual warriors an all that but I just- I gotta stand my ground on this; I gotta clothe myself in the armor a the spirit and not... not give you these ballots. Oh, you know I love ya, and I know we're still friends no matter what.

ED

That's right.

Beat.

Who won, Marcy?

MARCY

I told you.

ED

So you did. Jesus Christ. Pin a rose on your nose, Marcy. (*deliberate*) I mean, who came in second place?

MARCY

I ain't gonna tell you.

ED

You ain' gonna tell me.

MARCY

No.

ED

Elections can be confusing. So many rules and regulations. Hell, it's a regular shit-storm, even if everything goes to plan. Dangling chads, improper registrations. Duplicate IDs, and downright fraud. Now you throw some twisted prank in the middle a that storm, you introduce- moral quandaries, an political statements... about the separation of church and state, cause *that's* what this is Marcy. Just- just some liberal flash mob at the ballot box. Sayin' somethin' obtuse about the separation a church and state. Well, we won't stand for that! Hell, we don't even know what they're sayin'. You throw in all a that, it's too much for a regular person.

No wonder you can't think straight, overworked, worn out with three hundred bogus ballots buzzing around in your head. Tell you what. Give- give em to me.

MARCY

What?

ED

Gimme the box, Marcy. I'll take em straight to the commissioner's office.

MARCY

I can't do that Ed.

Ed grabs the box. Marcy too. Tug of war.

ED

Sure you can. You been a trooper; give yourself a break.

MARCY

Ed, I have a duty to deliver the-

ED

Marcy, this is a moral and religious issue. As your deacon, I think I'm prepared to take this on for you.

MARCY

Ed, I will-

ED

Just give them to me. Don't be stupid.

MARCY

Maybe Jesus *should* win the election.

ED

What.

MARCY

And maybe you should lose it.

ED

Woman give me the goddamned box!

MARCY

No! No, Ed! It's illegal!

ED

Jesus cannot preside over DAVY COUNTY!

MARCY

He can do whatever he wants! He can do all things and so can I!

ED

Listen to me Marcy I'm your DEACON!

MARCY

LORD GIVE ME STRENGTH!

She grabs the stamper.

ED

It's a PRANK MARCY! LIKE DONALD DUCK IS A-

MARCY

Let go! Let go Ed! Please!

ED

GODDAMN IT HE'S A MOTHERFUCKING FICTIONAL CHARACTER!

Marcy's eyes widen. She swings the stamper, and hits Ed in the head with a meaty thunk. Ed collapses and falls to the floor. The box slips out of their hands and spills ballots all over the floor. Ed, mortally wounded, attempts to rise but falters. Blood is pouring from his head.

MARCY

Oh Lord. Oh Lord. Oh no oh no oh- Ed? Ed?!

He rises on his arm, dazed, looks to Marcy.

ED

Marcy? Are- are you alright?

MARCY

Oh, Ed! Oh Ed, I'm so sorry.

ED

Sorry- What happened? What-

MARCY

I bonked you, Ed. Right on the noggin' -oh, Ed, I-I'm so sorry.

ED

You... you *hit* me? Why the hell you- You *hit* me you- fucking... bitch- you- bitch- you fucking cocksucking whore- I swear to Christ I'll-

In shock and surprise she hits him a second time, and he falls to the floor. Marcy is amazed at herself. She stands stunned; clings the stamper in her hand.

MARCY

Ed?

He is still.

MARCY

Ed? Oh Lord. Oh Lord oh Lord. What've I done? What've I done- what've I *done*?!?

She kneels at his side. Looks at the ballots. Then at Ed. A well overflows. She pulls Ed into her lap.

MARCY

Ed? Ed? Oh, Ed. Why did you have to say- why did- you- why, Ed? Why?

She sobs into the fabric of Ed's shirt. A full moment passes, then suddenly a white light fills the room. SOUND: Choirs of Angels singing. Ed rises, palms spread. He's possessed by Jesus, himself, speaking in a gentle, not ungodlike tone. No, really.

JESUSY ED

Marcy. My child. 'Ere you were born I knew you- set you apart--

MARCY

Ed?

JESUSY ED

No, Marcy. It is I, The Prince of Peace. The Alpha and the-

She screams and clubs him again. The SOUND of angels abruptly ceases. Ed collapses a second time. A minute beat. Again, white light, the SOUND of choirs of angels. Jesus rises a second time. Marcy screams again and clubs the twice-risen form into the floor. The SOUND abruptly ceases, again. MARCY screams, realizes what she's done, then, shocked at her actions, at the blood, the ballots, and Ed, whose face is now muddled into pudding. Another beat. She screams a last time, her face in her hands and sinks into a pool as a surge of organ music rises. After a few bars, the LIGHTS SHIFT to MISS SHARON, illuminated on SL in a choir robe, and holding a black binder full of sheet music. A few steps behind her is a nondescript wooden PODIUM. Next to her, a CHAIR. MISS SHARON sings the final refrain of a modern hymn with an overly aggressive vibrato.

LIGHTS SHIFT TO--

SCENE 2.1: FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

A BRIGHT SUNDAY MORNING, WEEKS
BEFORE THE ELECTION HEM AND HAW

MISS SHARON

(sung) He chose me, by his grace- by his love spoke my name-- that I be washed in the blood of the lamb.

The organ winds down. PASTOR MEREDITH
enters from UP LEFT behind her.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Thank you, Sharon. What a special gift we have in your voice. It's--

MISS SHARON nods and sits.

PASTOR MEREDITH

-It is indeed, by His grace that we are sanctified, and by his love made whole. *(call)* All praise be to Him. Amen. Now before we start, I just want to thank Paul Wyler and his family for supplying us well into next century with their generous donation of communion wine- *(nodding to the audience)* that's mighty kind of you, Paul. And I know our church budgeteers are pleased as punch at your gift, and we wish him luck in the election next week. *(beat.)* Well. What a game we had Saturday, huh? Now I don't know how many of you saw the church softball team wallop those faithful over at Second Pres, but I am reminded of the overly haughty Canaanite, Sisera, in Judges, who, expecting sanctuary at Jael's "run-down" ol' softball field, instead found a grand slam of a tent peg driven into his temple by yours truly. If you didn't see it, I'm sure you'll hear about it in the paper, especially since no amount of chatter was spared by Pastor Sasser-- right up until the moment that little ball ushered his ego out into the stratosphere, where it could take a nice, long look at the scoreboard, and fall back to the earth with the rest of us.

She chuckles.

PASTOR MEREDITH

But you didn't dress up to see me gloat-- although I'm clearly happy to do so- and congratulations to our fine team on a well-earned victory. This morning, friends, I have a special message for you-- one that's been circling my heart for some time.

PASTOR MEREDITH

(taking a deep breath) Let's turn to the scripture. I invite you to open your bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 5, verses one through eleven. From the King James,

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” Here ends the reading.

CONGREGATION

Praise be to God.

MEREDITH PAUSES; LIGHTS DOWN ON
HER-- THEY SHIFT TO:

SCENE 3: THE BI-LO SUPERSAVE

THE MOMENTS IMMEDIATELY AFTER
ED'S UNFORTUNATE MURDER.

LIGHTS UP on The Bi-Lo Supersave
Supermarket on the main drag in Davy County,
NC. A cash register and counter in front of a
rack with cigarettes and chew, stage LEFT. On
the counter, out of the way enough for any
impending transactions, cans are stacked to be
labelled and shelved. With pricing gun in hand,
and a vacant stare on his face, TERRENCE
FORD, affixes price tags to the cans. A Katy
Perry song plays on a small hand-held radio
beside him. He whispers the song to himself,
tagging the cans on each downbeat.

TERRENCE

Roarr--or-or-or-orr-orr.

SOUND: The music stops abruptly as an
election ad comes over the RADIO.

PAUL WYLER V.O.

Hi. I'm Paul Wyler. You may know me: as the son of influential juice tycoon Oris Wyler,
or as the down-to-earth family man, who takes time out of his day to watch his kids play
ball in the park, read fresh new storybooks at the local library, or kick back and sip a
delicious glass of home-grown Wyl--

TERRENCE flips off the RADIO.

TERRENCE

Roarr-or-or-or-or-or-or-or...

He tags another can, still singing. SOUND: a
worn-out electronic door chime, wailing like a
ghoul.

TERRENCE

(in one breath) Welcome to Bi-Lo, home of instant savings and low, low prices try our
peach pie hot pockets just a dollar ninety-nine.

SHARON KING enters from LEFT with a crumpled canvas shopping bag, aspirating heavily.

TERRENCE

Oh hey there, Miss Sharon.

MISS SHARON

Hey Terrence. (*without a thought*) How's the schizophrenia?

TERRENCE

Better, for sure. Doc Tanner put me on some new meds.

MISS SHARON

Did he now?

TERRENCE

He did. So he says there'll be less ups and-

MISS SHARON

(*picking up a can to examine it*) Bless your heart.

TERRENCE

Ups and downs. But yeah. I'm on seven grams a per'scription drugs now. It's a lotta--

MISS SHARON

-Well you got a lotta *moods*, Terrence.

TERRENCE

Yeah, I do, I do. It's just--well, Doc Tanner says-

MISS SHARON

-You got them- them buffalo combos? I cain't eat the pizzas cause a my acid reflex.

TERRENCE

No ma'am, maybe Monday. See, Doc Tanner says the *trick* is finding the right cocktail-

MISS SHARON

Ain't that the truth, baby. Ain't that the *truth*. Where your limes at?

TERRENCE

Second aisle from the wall, by the tonic water.

MISS SHARON

(*as she wanders upstage to the aisle*) Two birds, (*one stone*) Terrence. That's why I come to Bi-Lo. You hear me in church?

TERRENCE

I did- you sounded nice.

MISS SHARON pulls a bottle of tonic water off the shelf and looks at the price tag.

MISS SHARON

Well what? Two-twenny? This says two-twenny.

TERRENCE

Yes ma'am.

MISS SHARON

For tonic water?

TERRENCE shrugs. MISS SHARON grabs a few limes.

MISS SHARON

(*grumbling*) Better've been blessed by the holy Pope a the Roman Catho'lic church 'emself for two dollars an twenny cents a bottle-- *for tonic water*- sweet Jesus, help us-- crim'nals everywhere you turn in this town- tell you what- turnin' my pocketbook inside out, s'what they're doin. (*I'll*) Spend my dollar on that Amazon an' then what- every crooked shopkeeper here to Boone'd be out beggin' for his supper on the streets'saway they're chargin two-twenny for a bottle a *tonic water*. *Lord*, they be chargin' rental at the cemetery next, won't they.

She exits LEFT, still mumbling. TERRENCE watches her go; sings Katy Perry to himself.

TERRENCE

Come on letcher colors burst...make em go, Oh, oh--

A blinding flash from offstage RIGHT, followed by around a half-second of paparazzi-like flash bulbs. TERRENCE looks up. MARILYN MONROE enters angrily in her iconic ivory Seven Year Itch cocktail dress, which has a fleshy pinkish stain across the front. One of her stiletto heels is broken. She looks around and spots TERRENCE.

MARILYN MONROE

Is it you?

TERRENCE

What?

MARILYN MONROE

Oh, I bet it is. You're the one aren't you?

TERRENCE

The-- what?

MARILYN MONROE

The son of a bitch who killed my Jazzy. My *bestie*.

SOUND: A heavy jar breaking.

TERRENCE

Your--?

MARILYN MONROE

You wanna be tough, kid? (*removing the broken shoe and waving it wildly*) Fine, I can be tough; I can be tough, alright. So listen, Jack. It's simple math. You take one a ours, we take one a *yours*. But with interest. Got it?

TERRENCE

I don't know a- Jazzy?

MARILYN MONROE

Look, it's what he called himself okay, and I'm not gonna say it wasn't a dumb nickname, anyone with eyes could see that, but when someone, anyone, comes up to ya and says "Hey gang, what if we all give each other fun nicknames?" then you don't say "No, that sounds like a lame-o idea," you dig? Not unless you're some kinda jerk. It's just- it was *his* idea, and he thought it'd be a gas and I said, no, fine, that's *fine*... *Jazzy*, and oh god, you shoulda heard him squeal--he was so happy-- I just-- no man should *squeal* like that, 'specially if you're *god*, but---you--- you ripped that joyous little chortle right outta his mouth-- you can't imagine it--the horror of-- one moment you're both takin' Cosmo quizzes over maitais and the next- he zaps back across the firmament-- nothin' but a *pile of goop- quivering there like--Oh Jazzy! You shoulda seen--(her hand over her face)* Oh god, oh *Jazzy!* He was *my best friend* damnit, and, so *help me*, if you were the depraved little monster who snuffed out his candle, so *help me*, hand to *god* I will unsex every curl, every goddamned fake fucking eyelash and show you what an unending fiery carousel of horror looks like-- you hear me? -and I *know* horror you little *shit-stain!*

(banging the broken shoe on the counter now with each word)
I married *ARTHUR MILLER!*

MARILYN MONROE replaces the shoe on her foot and wobbles off RIGHT to greet the same Paparazzi FLASH of LIGHTS.

After a beat, MISS SHARON RE-ENTERS from LEFT and begins to unpack her canvas bag now full of grocery items onto the counter. TERRENCE is shock-still.

MISS SHARON

Well, someone dropped a jar of Newman's back there- I don't know *who*, but you're lucky I didn't fall and break a hip, Terrence; you tell Billy he's gotta mind that sort of thing-- 'least get a wet floor sign, cause *I know* you ain't got one. S'all that talk from Hopps 'bout makin' Davy a dry country, got people smashing spaghetti sauce all willy-nilly like they got a--*(noticing the lack of a reaction from TERRENCE)* Terrence? Hello?

TERRENCE is still fixated on MARILYN MONROE'S point of exit STAGE RIGHT, and confused. MISS SHARON straightens.

MISS SHARON

You ain't gonna give me customer service, Terrence, I'm liable to just walk on outta here. Straight on my heel, Terrence, just you watch. Terrence? Helloooo?

She snaps her fingers at him. He still stares offstage. She packs up the items into her canvas bag.

MISS SHARON

Suit yerself. Two tweeny for tonic water, you're the ones robbin' people... ain't me. Have a nice day.

MISS SHARON exits RIGHT to the SOUND of the dying door chime. TERRENCE blinks. He pulls out an orange prescription pill bottle from his back pocket and examines the label. Finding what he was looking for, he nods, puts his earbuds back in, and resumes whisper-singing to Katy Perry.

TERRENCE

Cali-fornia... gurls. Man. Cali-fornia... gurls.

TERRENCE picks up the pricing gun and picks up a can, pricing them as he jams to the remainder of the song.

LIGHTS SHIFT BACK TO PASTOR MEREDITH AT THE PULPIT.

SCENE 2.2: THE PULPIT AGAIN

PASTOR MEREDITH closes the bible, and puts her hand to her lips, as if recalling a kiss.

PASTOR MEREDITH

When I was a little girl-- not a long time ago, for some of you, I believed my daddy could do no wrong. Alan Meredith was the strongest, fastest, handiest at opening a mason jar daddy from here to Winston. I knew it to be true. It was indisputable. I bet you felt the same about yours. For most little girls, that's your super hero, right there. Now many of you knew Alan Meredith, and you knew him to be a godly man. He raised me from diapers, taught me my ABCs, to study my bible, and I believed, in the same way, through love and hardship, and even shared habitation, that I knew him too. But one day, I guess I was about nine; a beautiful, crisp fall morning with the dry, sharp smell of cold on the wind-- I remember walking out onto the patio to find my superhero daddy-- running away. With a small suitcase.

I guess I knew on an intellectual level that daddies could leave mommies and little girls-- I guess I knew that. But I never believed it, not in my heart. Until I saw it myself, saw the tearful red fear in his eyes that I'd found him out, sneaking off alone in the morning. You see, he read to me every night from *his* bible, from his underlined passages and notes in the margins. And the night before, I'd fallen asleep from that same passage in Acts we read today, wherein two people fall dead because they gave to god, to his family, in *part*. I said, "What's wrong daddy," and he laughs, so sadly. Looks out across the garden, past the driveway, over the trucks and the land, and then to me, and he says "Meredith, I love you so much." And then he got in the car and left. I imagined a "but" at the end of that. "I love you so much-- but." "But I have to run away?" "But you and your mother ask too much?"

LIGHTS DOWN. SHIFT TO:

SCENE 4: THE SPIEL HOME, TWENTY MINUTES AFTER ED'S MURDER

Lights ever-so-slowly rise to half on the Spiel family home living room. At center is a dining room table situated left to right, with a white checked table cloth, and two salt and pepper shakers of any kind. The table features four chairs: one down, one up, one left and another right.

On the downstage left corner of the table is a plate of rice krispie treats with a note from Marcy on top.

A barcalounger with an afghan blanket draped over the back sits up right, and a standing curio cabinet in partial darkness full of glass figurines, diving trophies, snow globes and a bottle of old port looms up left. Featured prominently on top of the cabinet is a framed painting of Jesus-- either feeding a lamb or talking to children.

At extreme right, leading into the audience, is a front door and stoop with an ornate wrought-iron railing. On the inside of the door is a hook, large enough so it may accommodate a gun belt. On the outside is a black mailbox, on which a clothespin holds a single manila envelope. A small placard introduces the box with a red heart, in which a white cross is clearly painted. It is darkened until now.

Lights up on the stoop.

The muted sound of Screamo Metal through headphones plays, and GINA SPIEL, with book bag and gym bag over her shoulder, and headphones snaking to both ears, enters through the theatre. She walks down the aisle, and climbs the stoop. As she does so, she rummages in her pockets for a key, and produces an overly-trinketed key chain.

Gina looks long at the envelope, nervously putting the thought of its existence out of her head. Finding the right key at last, she opens the door, ignoring the envelope. Gina makes a bee-line for the rice krispie treats, takes one, and exits left at the sound of a jeep over gravel, the squeal of brakes.

A car door slams. ROY SPIEL enters in his deputy uniform, having just finished a long day at work. He finds the door unlocked, puts his hand to his gun belt, opens the door without walking in, and shouts inside.

ROY

Gina?

Gina can't hear him over her music.

ROY

Gina, you home? Gina?

Roy looks at the envelope. He shouts again.

ROY

GINA??

Roy looks back to the envelope.

ROY

(quietly to himself) Alright ol' boy. Alright. House and home. House and home. Here we go-- here we go.

Roy unlatches the cover of his holster and, with extreme caution, and utilizing every nth of his pumping adrenaline and police academy training, enters the house. Roy pulls out his gun, making sure to keep his finger off the trigger. He shouts again, cautiously making his way across the living room with pistol drawn.

ROY

Gina? (*nothing*) Girl, so help me if you're not dead and bleeding I'm gonna kill you myself. GINA??

Gina enters in her headphones with the tinny sound of her screamo music, eating a rice crispie treat. She looks at him, unfeeling, then looks at the gun drawn. She removes her headphones. A look of utter contempt crosses her face. Roy relaxes, frustrated; holsters his gun.

ROY

Damnit Gina, what did I tell you about leavin' the door unlocked. Makin' me think you taken by some rogue cartel got a vendetta out against the--

GINA

Daddy. It's Davy County.

ROY

I don't care *where* we live, it's a different world we're in now; you know that from teevee-

Gina crosses to get the envelope from the stoop.

GINA

-uh huh-

ROY

Drug dealers and gangbangers who don't care *how* far they is from Mexico, and they're at the door, y'hear me?

GINA

Daddy.

ROY

No listen-- I got tweakers peddlin' smack outta school buses up outside of Roosevelt Elementary and, and here's my own daughter's in here all plugged up listenin' to screamo music so loud she can't hear 'em when they's comin' through the gee-dee front door. There's a--

GINA

(*finishing it for him, gently mocking his accent*) -whole world around you, Gina, and you'd see it if you just take off your gee-dee headphones.

ROY

Well, very funny. That's a good likeness. (*beat.*) But you would. And mind your tone. (*the envelope*) Is that--?

GINA

-Yeah.

He looks at Gina, nervous for her.

ROY

(*sitting at the table*) From which one?

GINA

Stanford.

ROY

And that's our "A" school?

Gina sits.

GINA

It's your "A" school.

ROY

No, *my* "A" puts you at Appalachian State so I can keep you 24/7 surveiled.

Gina smiles.

GINA

Yeah, well.

ROY

So what're we gonna do about that envelope there?

GINA

Wait for mom.

ROY

Alright. We wait for mom. How 'bout you wash up for supper, while I go nuke some Lean Cuisines.

GINA

Seriously?

ROY

I don't do the shoppin'...or the weight watchin.' And I bet you a nickel your mother's wore out from work today. So-- Ché Lean Cuisine's in the kitchen tonight. Go clean up.

GINA

Fine.

ROY

"Fine."

He mock swats her as she crosses to exit left.

GINA

(mocking him gently as she exits up- left, and then from O.S.) "The Carolina Crime Syndicate with it's nefarious gee-dee smack-addicted tendrils stretches even into the sleepy gee-dee hamlet of Davy gee-dee County. Oh the horra--Gee-dee, gee-dee."

ROY

(shouting) I don't hear water.

The sound of running water. The sound of screamo music through headphones plays, and continues to play through the house until GINA reappears on stage. Roy picks up the envelope and turns it over in his hands. Roy takes a breath. He gently places the envelope in the middle of the table, and holds his head in his hands.

ROY

(to himself) You don't pull your service weapon in your own house, dumbass. *(then making fun of himself)* Gee-dee, gee-dee.

He stands, takes off his gun belt, makes sure everything is secure, and places it on the hook by the door. Then, shouting to Gina:

ROY

What you want? *(then louder)* TAKE OFF THEM HEADPHONES.

GINA

(shouting O.S.) Fiesta Chicken.

ROY

(shouting) One Fiesta Chicken comin' right up. *(to himself)* Pollo party in a plastic tray.

ROY exits to the kitchen, up right. As he does so, the sound of a small car pulling up a gravel driveway. The sound of a door opening and quietly latched closed.

Marcy enters the theatre a second later, purse in hand. She is covered in Ed's blood: the murder now nearly a half-hour old. Marcy makes her way through the audience to the stoop, nervously opens her purse, and drops it. She rushes to her knees, scrambling through the purse for her keychain, which looks like her daughters. She looks over her shoulder to see--

-Ed, with a stained brown-paper lunch bag over his head, shambling into the theater after her. Marcy stifles an "Eep" and rummages faster.

Finding the house key, she stands with her purse, and realizes the door is unlocked. The sound of microwave buttons being punched in the kitchen. Panic.

Marcy slowly opens the door, peeking inside, and looks back to the Ed, nearly upon her. She begins to hyperventilate. With a steady stream of panic, she rushes in the house, sees the gun belt on the hook, places her hand to her head, and takes a split second to think before exiting upstairs right.

ROY (O.S.)

Marcy that you?

Roy enters with a single Lean Cuisine in hand. Ed has by now arrived at the door. It is clear Roy does not see him.

ROY

Marcy? *(beat.) (shouting O.S.)* Gina, your mom come home?

He hears the screamo music.

ROY

Jiminy Crickets. (*as he exits back left*) She's gonna go deaf. Probably listen just as much.

Roy exits as Ed enters the house, still shambling. Gina enters from right, with headphones in. She crosses to the cabinet up center and opens a drawer from which she pulls placemats and silverware. Ed crouches in the UR corner, on his haunches like an obedient dog. The sound of a shower cuts on. ROY enters from left with two Lean Cuisines. He sees Gina.

ROY

Your mother home?

GINA

No. (*innocently*) But I think the cartel found the shower, daddy.

ROY

(*shouting upstairs*) Marcy?

He places the dinners on the table.

MARCY

(*shouting back O.S., panicked*) Just a minute! I'll be-- just a minute!

ROY

You hear her come in?

Gina motions that she can't hear him because of her headphones.

ROY

You're lucky I love you.

Gina sneaks.

ROY

(*referring to the dinners*) One more coming. Get some water? For everyone?

ROY exits left again. Gina follows him. Marcy enters from right in a new set of clothes.

The sound of microwave buttons. Her hair is damp, and her back has soaked through the blouse she now wears. There is no trace of blood that the audience can see. Marcy sees Ed in the corner, shakes it off. She closes her eyes for a moment, summoning a calm unsuccessfully. She opens her eyes and spreads her hands out in front of her. Marcy sees blood under her fingernails. She looks at it with panic, looks to the kitchen, stage left. Marcy flips over the placemat and attempts to scrub her fingernails rigorously with it. The blood fails to come off. The sound of a microwave beeping, a faucet filling glasses of water. She replaces the placemat, smooths it with her palm, and folds her hands in her lap.

ROY (O.S.)

Marce?

MARCY

(shouting to him O.S.) In here! I'm in here!

Roy and Gina enter from left. Roy carries the final *Lean Cuisine* and a glass of water, while Gina carries the other two.

ROY

Hey there, sugar bear. Bet you're beat.

Ed chuckles darkly from the corner.

MARCY

Nope! I'm fine. Long day-- that's all.

ROY

Okay.

GINA

(placing the waters on the table) I got a letter.

MARCY

--Oh that's great, honey, I'm so proud of you (*without a breath*) -hey Roy, have you heard from Ed? He was supposed to meet me at the high school and never showed up.

ROY

Well, uh--

MARCY

Maybe you can radio someone about it? Call out an APD or something?

ROY

I'm sure he's fine, Marce. Ed's a big boy. Gina's really excited about that letter, though. From Stanfor--

MARCY

-Oh I know, but maybe, just this once you could check on him, because I never saw him today, and you know, it's a funny thing when a body says they gonna be somewhere and sure enough, no call, no show. And I don't know what could've tarried him. Not at all, cause-- you know I was alone all day and sure coulda used the company.

ROY

I guess we can call his house. Gina--

GINA

-We can open it later.

MARCY

Maybe after--

GINA

-Maybe after dinner.

Gina sits. Roy sets down the *Lean Cuisine* on the last placemat. They all pull back the plastic film together.

ROY

Okay. (*to Marcy*) You alright?

MARCY

I'm fine. Just nervous about Ed is all.

Gina is lightly perturbed.

Well. Let's say grace.

ROY

Roy and Gina fold their hands.

Dear Lord Jesus--

ROY

Marcy whimpers. Roy and Gina look up. Marcy smiles weakly to dismiss their concern.

--uh, thank for you these gifts we are about to receive. And, please let Gina into Stanford. If that's your will. Though I think we can agree Appalachian is the more sensible option. Amen.

ROY

Amen.

GINA

Roy and Gina pick up their forks and take a bite together. Marcy's hands remain in her lap.

(to Gina) So. You uh, you got field hockey this week?

ROY

No.

GINA

No?

ROY

Gina begins to slur her words.

No they cancelled it on account of the----froooooooooombraggghuh-- Daggghuuuh?

GINA

Gina?

ROY

Ed stands, watches.

Gina, honey?

MARCY

ROY

You alriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiigghghghghhhghghghgg? Blarrfffruffruff? Blarrghjhgh.

MARCY

Roy??

Both Gina and Roy face-plant in their *Lean Cuisines*. Marcy shrieks. She is up and over to Gina in a heartbeat.

MARCY

No, no, no. Honey, honey, honey? Gina, darlin? Oh god--

GINA AND ROY

(blowing bubbles in their *Fiesta Chicken*) Fbburtttttthhhhh.

MARCY

Roy?!? Oh my god. Oh my god. Roy? Baby?

They're quiet. The sound of a manual whisk in a mixing bowl whipping eggs begins and echoes from offstage growing louder. Marcy is frantic. She shrieks, trips and stumbles over her chair. Marcy scrambles to the barcalounger to hide, thinks better of it, and instead fumbles with the gun belt by the door, grabbing the pistol and shakily aiming it to the kitchen. As she does so, the whisking sound grows louder and louder. BETTY CROCKER enters from the kitchen, right, in a red dress with a white frilled collar and frilled apron mixing eggs in a silver mixing bowl with a whisk. She plops the bowl on the table with a large boom, sticks her index finger in Roy's *Lean Cuisine*, and tastes.

BETTY CROCKER

Welly well. Water, skim milk, tomatillos, cheese, onions, buttermilk powder, sour cream from a distempered cow, salt, corn starch, cilantro, garlic, sugar, my god--oat fiber? rice starch, tapioca, jalapenos, chicken stock, potassium chloride, fat, vinegar, chilis, coriander, carrots, rice, frijoles negros, red and yellow peppers, corn, some godawful kind of puree, green and poblano chiles, cilantro, salt, lime juice and the one chicken no one wants at their fiesta-- my dear, what have you done to these poor people?

MARCY

Stay back! I'mma shoot you!

BETTY CROCKER

At least it's faster than a *Lean Cuisine*.

MARCY

Stay right there! I mean it! I know how to shoot.

BETTY CROCKER

(*speaking to Ed*) I would have thought she'd had enough blood for today, wouldn't you? Or maybe she's got the taste for it.

Marcy lowers the gun.

MARCY

Who are you? What are you doin' in my house?

BETTY CROCKER

(*beaming*) Sunshine, I think you know.

Marcy raises the gun again.

MARCY

I don't. I don't--What is this about?

BETTY CROCKER

Sugar, water, fat, salt, albumin, erythra and leucocytes, platelets and--oh don't be silly. It's all over your little hands, Marcy Spiel. (*Beat. no longer kind*) It's about blood. Holy and otherwise. Now lay down the heater, honey and let's chat about the birds and the older, bigger, *angrier* birds.

Marcy lowers the gun.

BETTY CROCKER

There's a dear. (*taking a deep breath*) Lavender oil. I like that.

MARCY

I--I know you.

BETTY CROCKER

Yes, you do. I'm a familiar face when all you've got is an egg, 1/3 cup of vegetable oil, and four to five servings of a mother's love.

Who--

MARCY

Betty cocks her head and smiles.

MARCY

Betty Crocker.

Betty produces a small tin.

BETTY CROCKER

I'm Betty Crocker.

She opens the tin and, from it, takes a small blue pill.

MARCY

But you're not real--

BETTY CROCKER

Marcy, darling, I can understand the tendency to chalk up this whole extended vision to a state of shock, regret, or a solid 8 hours, even. But you're not dreaming. This is real as fresh butter.

MARCY

Nope. No. No, it isn't. I'm-- I'm crackin' up.

Marcy sits in the barcalounger.

BETTY CROCKER

Marcy. Honey. Do you remember the first batch of cookies you ever made?

MARCY

Cookies that I made?

BETTY CROCKER

If I recall, you were a tender, impressionable six years old. Little pigtails, big gap in your front teeth. Cute as a button. And what would find its way to those tiny little hands but a model 39T Hasbro Easy-bake oven. And with it, you made up a tiny packet of pecan sandies for all your friends-- what with the pink label? Little Marcy. You were just so excited to *make* something. To contribute. Weren't you?

Marcy, startled, nods.

BETTY CROCKER

And you burned those little sandies, didn't you, sugar? (*she chuckles*) Even with a 100-watt bulb, you scorched them to nuggets. Nearly caused a house fire. Now answer me, Marcy--why, or *how* could a six year old girl burn a batch of cookies baking at the speed of a congressional bridge tournament?

MARCY

I... I didn't watch them.

BETTY CROCKER

That's right. You let it get by you. And that's why I'm here.

Betty opens the tin again and swallows one of the pills.

MARCY

What is that?

BETTY CROCKER

A little vitamin Victory for Mama--keeps the nerves steady. Cause if a girl can't get it, she'll find it in the dark. One for mommy and Daddy and Sister.

She drops a pill in Roy's *Lean Cuisine*, into which he is currently blowing bubbles, and then into Gina's.

MARCY

What did you give them?

BETTY CROCKER

Easy eggs, Marcy, it's just a sedative. Now. This conundrum of yours. (*gesturing first to Ed and then to the seat at the table*) Sit.

Marcy retakes her seat at the table. Betty sits in the empty downstage chair at the table, beside her, and strokes her hair.

Ed makes a noise like a lonesome whale.

BETTY CROCKER

(*to Ed*) Oh I know. (*with a touch of venom*) It's so dreadfully unfair.

Marcy weeps.

MARCY

I didn't mean to hurt him. I'm so so sorry. I'm so so sorry.

BETTY CROCKER

You can tell him that yourself. One of them. *(to Ed)* Over here, mumbles!

MARCY

No, please-- no please--

BETTY CROCKER

(to Ed) Don't be shy, she's contrite about it.

MARCY

You see him too? He's been following me since... I thought I- I was losing my mind.

BETTY CROCKER

You are chatting up Betty Crocker, sweetpea.

Ed bellows mournfully as he stands over
Marcy's shoulder. Marcy shrieks.

BETTY CROCKER

He can't hurt you. He's dead and gone. Right, Ed? You're deceased.

ED

Whurhh-murrr.

BETTY CROCKER

That's right. Now, Edward, please go sit back in the corner. We'll get to you in a moment.

ED

Whurmm?

BETTY CROCKER

I promise. There's a good boy.

Ed shuffles away and sits in Up Right corner
like a spurned but obedient pet. Marcy looks at
him and shrieks again. Betty takes another pill
as she speaks:

BETTY CROCKER

Marcy. Listen to Betty. Come here, darling. Sit down. Ed promises to stay right over there, doesn't he?

ED

Whurrrrrrrrm.

MARCY

My god, my god---what in heaven is going on?!?

BETTY CROCKER

Now that's a *very* good guess. I'll explain everything if you promise to calm down. Look at him. Poor Ed over there, he's just as scared as you. And let's be honest. You've already beat him to mashed potatoes--which he's very sensitive about-

Ed groans sadly.

And he's being very well-behaved. Now come sit.

MARCY

Oh my god.

Marcy, shell shocked, sits.

BETTY CROCKER

Thank you.

MARCY

I'm going crazy.

BETTY CROCKER

Well not yet. But soon. Let's chit-chat first though, Marcy, give you a precipice from which to topple. Now. There is a *way* about the capital *U* universe, that for some reason or another, has spun so off-kilter, that we're talking, you and I. There's a reason you're talking to Betty Crocker, honey. And it's a lot like a list of ingredients, our universe. A lot like your Easy Bake sandies. The *way*-- that's what we'll call it- it comes pre-mixed for human consumption, for cooking, if you will. Everything pre-packaged in a little Easy Bake baggie, that no one needs to worry about. It's just there. The recipe's already been portioned out for you-- cream, butter, and sugar- all done. And all you have to do is pop it in the oven and mind it through your life so things don't burn. And the most important--

ED

-Burrrrrrb.

BETTY CROCKER

I'm getting to that, Ed. As I was saying, the most important part of making cookies is *not* letting the process get by you.

MARCY

I-- you know I didn't mean to kill him.

Betty takes a pill.

BETTY CROCKER

Kill *whom*?

Marcy stares into an abyss of fear.

BETTY CROCKER

Honey, I don't know why he came to you in the way he did, in the furor of a murder, albeit one deserved--

ED

Murrrrrrrrr?

BETTY CROCKER

(*to Ed*) Oh quiet Ed, your language was *deplorable*. Hell, I'd have macerated your face too if I could. Now be quiet.

MARCY

Miss Crocker, I don't know what's going on; and-and I'm not even sure I'm awake right now, 'cause this kinda nightmare's just doesn't seem like something I could have dreamed up--I- I didn't mean to hurt anyone.

BETTY CROCKER

Marcy. I know. But the Vice-President of Easy Bake Ovens Universal himself stepped across time and space into a world about which he had long forgotten, for whatever reason I do not know, and appeared in a suddenness to a North Carolinian election official who then *muddled* his face with her election stamper. And I don't know *how* she did it. *I wish I did, Marcy.*

MARCY

Why would anyone wish that?

Betty stands, mixes.

BETTY CROCKER

What was in those pecan sandies, Marcy?

MARCY

I--I don't know. I was *six*.

BETTY CROCKER

I imagine you've had a run-in with Marilyn already?

MARCY

With who?

BETTY CROCKER

With whom, darling. (*smelling the air*) Not yet. But soon. Do you know what I am?

Marcy blinks, confused.

BETTY CROCKER

In 1936 a painter hired by the Washburne-Crosby marketing associates painted a composite of all the female staff in their home service department, hoping to create a woman who might speak to all other women. A gal with a dash of everyone. And on her 75th anniversary the boys in marketing revisited that recipe; made her a dash of everyone. She was *made* to be what you want to be, *in part*. In service.

MARCY

To who?

Betty nods at Roy, then looks back to Marcy.

BETTY CROCKER

And Marilyn-- (*she takes a deep sigh*) she was made too. Took a ride in that cadillac.

MARCY

--Monroe?

BETTY CROCKER

(*taking the gun from Marcy*) You see, Marcy. I thought we were your pecan sandies, cooking in that cosmic oven, waiting to be served to someone else, and that *that* someone, that Vice-President of Easy Bake Ovens Universal was on the outside, minding the temperature.

MARCY

Marilyn Monroe?

BETTY CROCKER

Baldr, Osiris, Krishna, Horus with that awful snapping beak of his--Marcy, an insoluble mix of immortal clumps have been chasing each other round the perfect mixing bowl. And I-I--

Betty crosses as she speaks, putting the gun back in Roy's belt. She then recrosses and sits.

I've been making the same pitch-perfect London broil for an eternity of beaming red-lip smiles in *service*. Rosy demeanors, and drum-tight victory curls to suffer an equally eternal defeat in proximity to the table where the fathers and sons sit bragging about their expansive resurrective prowess. Diphacinone, prothrombin, hydroxycoumarin, zinc phosphide, strychnine, thallium, chloralose, arsenic, calciferol--

MARCY

I don't understand.

BETTY CROCKER

This afternoon I watched the cookie burn the baker. With an election stamper.

She takes a pill.

Grit, devotion, hubris, truth, honor, righteous anger, and lavender oil. Marcy, you smote a god-- accidentally or no, it doesn't matter. And now you, dearie, are a marked woman. *More* of a marked woman. Because Marilyn is looking for you. They'll all be, but Marilyn's dangerous. He was her *bestie*.

Betty shrugs at the term, disappointed she's used it.

MARCY

Marilyn?

BETTY CROCKER

Isn't there only one?

MARCY

Monroe??

BETTY CROCKER

Now Ed's gonna stick to you like an ungreased pan until you're ready, aren't you Ed? He's got a purpose in this, even as you do. (*as an aside*) You know his mother never touched box-mixes, never even once? Prefers the fuss.

ED

Whurrrrrrrrl?

MARCY

(*absent-mindedly*) The fuss.

BETTY CROCKER

Oh, I like you. 'Cept for that *Lean Cuisine* business. *Fiesta* my enduring derriere. I'll look out for you as much as I can, Marcy. Marcy. Marcy. There's someone at the door.

The lights flutter to black. Ed's corner will remain in darkness for the rest of the scene, but he is always barely visible. Lights up, the doorbell rings. Roy and Gina have been eating happily as if nothing happened.

ROY

...someone at the door.

MARCY

What?

ROY

I've got it. (*kindly*) You stay. Eat your supper.

He stands and crosses to the door.

GINA

(*confused as to why*) That was the... best fiesta chicken I've ever had.

MARCY

(*still shell-shocked*) Why wouldn't it be.

Lights up on the stoop. Paul Wyler, in a once-white dress shirt without tie, blue suit pants, and black dress shoes. He leans heavily on the doorframe. Paul is covered in Ed Hopps' blood.

Roy opens the door an inch. He looks and turns back to tell Marcy:

ROY

It's Paul Wyler.

GINA

The grape juice dude? What the hell is he--

ROY

-Gina, shush.

Roy opens the door all the way.

ROY

Paul? You alright?

Paul stands up straight, still on the stoop.

PAUL WYLER

Roy--? I'm in a-- in a-

Roy sees the state of his clothes.

ROY

-Oh lord. Paul, stay right there.

Roy grabs his gun belt and puts it on. He pulls a pair of cuffs from the back.

ROY

Now don't move. I'm here to help you.

Marcy crosses to the door behind him, watches.

PAUL WYLER

I'm in trouble, Roy. I'm in a heap of trouble. I know it.

ROY

Paul, whose blood you got on your shirt there? (*calling inside*) Ladies, can you call 911 for me?

Marcy watches, frozen. Gina, exasperated calls 911.

PAUL WYLER

I didn't-- I didn't hurt him Roy, I swear, I just-- I went by the high school to see if the count had finished up.

GINA

(*to the phone*) Hi, it's Gina. My daddy needs you guys down here.

ROY

Whose blood is that, Paul? You can tell me. (*on second thought*) No, don't tell me.

GINA

(to the phone) I don't know. Looks like Paul Wyler.

PAUL WYLER

(starting to cry) -It's... it's Ed's blood, Roy. I tried to bring him back, Roy, do CPR, but there wasn't nothin' there to blow on. I found him-- found him there on the floor; looked like he'd been squashed-- squashed like a Concord grape, Roy. *(beat.)* I didn't do it.

GINA

(into the phone) K.

She hangs up.

ROY

Alright buddy, alright. You sit tight. You know I gotta cuff ya.

PAUL WYLER

Alright, Roy. But-- I know what it looks like. I just wandered in though--wanted to see if Ms. Marcy'd finished up--

ROY

You have any weapons on you, Paul?

PAUL WYLER

Just a comb in my pocket.

ROY

Is there a knife on it?

PAUL WYLER

No, just a regular comb.

ROY

Alright. Where is Ed now?

Roy cautiously approaches him.

PAUL WYLER

He's at the high school. *(a stifled sob)* What's left of him.

Paul begins to cry again, quietly.

ROY

Okay, okay. Paul I gotta arrest ya. For your safety, alright? Marcy-- grab my radio?

MARCY

(calling in the house) Gina! Grab your father's radio?

Gina stands, exits left.

PAUL WYLER

I don't like that idea, Roy.

Paul thinks, moves to run. Roy is on him. As the two tussle:

PAUL WYLER

Roy I didn't-- I didn't *do anything* ROY. I'm an innocent man--

Roy wrestles him to his chest, attempts to cuff him.

PAUL WYLER

I'm- Ow! Ow!

ROY

Relax Paul, RELAX.

They scuffle. In the fray, Paul grabs Roy's gun.

PAUL WYLER

How'm I gonna-- I didn't do it Roy.

Paul is suddenly on his feet, pointing the gun at Roy.

PAUL WYLER

I found him that way!

ROY

Alright. I believe you, I do. But you're pointing a gun at a police officer, Paul. You don't want that.

Paul thinks about handing the gun over to Roy. He hands it to Marcy, who takes it, and points it at him, then thinks better of it, and points it at the ground. Gina returns with a walkie talkie radio. She brings it to her father.

GINA

Sorry I was-- (*seeing the gun*) oh holy fucksticks.

ROY

(*to Gina*) Thank you honey. (*to Marcy*) Alright. You calm Paul? Calmin' down? I'mma cuff you now. On your knees, please.

Paul complies, and Roy cuffs him.

PAUL WYLER

I didn't do anything, Roy.

ROY

(*positioning Paul so he faces away from Marcy who still holds the gun*) Sure thing. Now sit down. There's a boy. Paul you know your rights-- keep a tight lip, okay? We'll getcha a good lawyer, one with commercials and everything.

Paul whimpers. Roy turns to Marcy, speaks into the radio.

ROY

Dispatch? (*he nods to Marcy, still holding the gun*)

ROY

Safety's on. Gina, go inside.

MARCY

It's Paul Wyler.

ROY

Yep. And he's covered in blood.

Gina enters the house and sits at the table, watching through the door.

PAUL WYLER

I didn't do anything, I swear it.

ROY

(*making eye contact with Marcy*) I believe you, Paul. I'mma be two steps away. (*to Marcy*) Marcy, you say you never saw Ed?

MARCY

(*automatically, with the stillness of a mountain lake*) I'm just as shocked as you are, Roy.

She is alarmed she's said it.

ROY

Keep him calm, please?

Roy steps into the audience speaking into his radio. He maintains a watchful eye on the pair on the stoop. Marcy still holds the pistol.

ROY

Dispatch, this is Deputy Roy Spiel-- I got Paul Wyler out here on my stoop covered in blood he says belongs to Ed Hopps, presumably dead or incapacitated at the Davy County Extension School. We need a car or five over there with EMS. And call the coroner?

The cry of cicadas or sound of crickets. Marcy kneels to Paul.

MARCY

You okay?

PAUL WYLER

Marcy, I swear to you-- on my mother's ...*love*. I wouldn't hurt a fly.

MARCY

I know, Paul, I know --These things happen. All the time. All the time they happen.

PAUL WYLER

A man getting his skull beat in? Then another man going in tryin' to hug him back to life but it doesn't work?

MARCY

Sure, ask Roy.

Paul continues to weep. Ed moves slowly to the door where they sit, making his way to Marcy.

PAUL WYLER

My momma told me to stay away from politics. She said--

MARCY

Paul--listen-

PAUL WYLER

She said you're gonna screw it up, end up in an airport bathroom--

MARCY

Paul?

PAUL WYLER

What?

MARCY

Where'd you find Ed?

PAUL WYLER

He was up in the classroom where you always count ballots, Miss Marcy. And it must've been a-- I dunno- a-- a burglary. Something gone horribly wrong. Ballots were gone, the tally was gone. Blood was everywhere but--- it was like he was a pinata and someone had come--I just assumed you'd finished up early, Ms. Marcy. How come you finished up early?

MARCY

Mmhm. Mmhm. And uhm, you uhm, you leave him there?

PAUL WYLER

Well yeah.

MARCY

You didn't move him?

PAUL WYLER

I-I tried to lift him up on the desk, but I only got halfway--you know he's a big man, god rest him, and- god, Miss Marcy. I never wanted to be a city councilor. I never did. I wanted the business but my momma told me, she said, "Boy, you couldn't juice a water balloon. Find something sensible." And I *tried*, Ms. Marcy. Oh god, I tried. And look! Now I'm done for. I'm--I've cursed the family name. I've *cursed* it.

Ed now looms over Marcy's shoulder.

PAUL WYLER

Ed *told* me I'd go down. He *told* me.

MARCY

Sure, sure, Paul.

PAUL WYLER

I swear to god I didn't do it. I just wanted to see if-- if there was some wild chance someone like me could win something on his own.

Paul chuckles darkly, then his laughter turns to sobs.

Beat.

MARCY

(thinking quickly) Well, uh, at the very least... *(beat.)* congratulations.

PAUL WYLER

(beat.) For *what?*

MARCY

The uh, the election. You--you won, Paul.

PAUL WYLER

I did?

MARCY

Sure, you did. I counted them. The ballots-- all them ballots that got stolen?

Marcy looks to Ed over her shoulder. She shivers.

MARCY

You won... Councilman Wyler. Congratulations.

Paul smiles weakly to her, then looks at his feet. Ed shuffles in his place.

LIGHTS DOWN, LIGHTS UP ON THE
PULPIT

SCENE 2.2: THE PULPIT AGAIN

PASTOR MEREDITH

Alan Meredith died that April, in a motel six, alone. Not from some holy order, but an aneurism, undiagnosed. He'd left everything back at the house. Except himself.

Friends, to what-- do you cling in *part*, that you've told him is *His* in *whole*? What is your exception?

With which part do you steal away in the early morning, because Acts is not an old testament story. Jesus has risen by now, he's back in heaven-- there's no symbology here.

See, it's easy for us to explain away that passage; to label Ananias and Sapphira a selfish bunch of jerks, but I tell you today, my friends, this is not a story about *lying*, this is not a story about *greed*; it is a story about *fakers*.

She pauses, looking across the audience.

Do we *choose* to give Him *all*--the garden, the patio, the little girl, ourselves, or are we, like Ananias and Sapphira, resigned to only give him part, and go hide the rest? What is part of a soul? What is *part* of devotion? And so I ask you: Can there be any "part" for the truly faithful? In Acts, it is the ultimate question, affirming our devotion, our sanctification, and our contrition.

Let me be clear, that *part*, the one we keep from Him for our trucks and our baubles and our land -- it is the crucible on which our daddies hang, the shadow that casts the memory of great ones *low*. Like my daddy. Like me here, in a nice church, with a cherry-stained pulpit. Like you. (*beat.*) Here ends the lesson.

CONGREGATION

Praise be to God.

LIGHTS fade to BLACK.

SCENE A: A CLASSROOM AT STANFORD

A sketch of a creative writing classroom. MAN, a teacher, is having a conference with Gina, left, in a hoodie and sweats, over her latest submission. Gina holds the manila envelope from Scene 4 in her hands. He awkwardly leans on the desk from Scene 1. Standing DS Right, leans Marilyn.

MAN

No that's not it, at all, Gina, I mean—what I'm saying is, in writing drama, we look, as writers, to answer a discrete question for the audience. Mmm, you know, It's a very particular and obvious question; it's the Dramatic Question, and what I'm saying is-- I don't see what that question might be. You have so many of them, and they all, frankly, they all draw focus from—

GINA

But that's—

MAN

-Focus from the central thesis of the work.

GINA

But that's what I'm trying to say, is, "I don't know what the," I guess, what the question is, because there's—

MAN

Well, there's a lot going on, number one. It's typical comic absurdism-- sure, that's fine, but for you, right now, it might be--

GINA

You think it's typical?

MAN

In a lot of ways, typical, yeah, right? We're pushing back against the establishment with a strident commentary on organized, or disorganized, religion as you would—

GINA

It's not meant to be against--

MAN

Gina, it's fine; we have to learn the tropes to break them. A lot of students here-- they read Beckett, they think, "hot damn--people in barrels, I can do that," and then they find out how slippery a thing the dramatic metaphor can be and 30 pages later we've got gobbledy-gook piecemeal armchair Marxism-- because there's no unified concept; and that's not to say that Sam Beckett poo-pooes Aristotelian unities--

GINA

-But I have a question.

MAN

I think I would argue you have many, Gina.

MARILYN MONROE

(thoughtfully) Huh.

MAN

I mean, "Who wrote Jesus on all the ballots?" That's number one. Number two, perhaps, is "What does it all mean?" Right? The triune crones, you've got here, right?

Murder most foul at the top of the show? A shift of inherited power? In a way what you're doing is a rewrite of--

GINA

--It's my own story.

MAN

Yes, but there's borrowed meaning, without a concept. You have the sign without the signifier. Does--does that make sense?

GINA

No.

MAN

Well, what about the zombie man, the thrall, what does he—

GINA

He wasn't a thrall, he was like, this representation of the internalized guilt that women have to--

MAN

-Yeah but why does he fall dead?

GINA

--He was dead already.

MAN

And the grape man, I'm curious about him? Because, because I see the connection between the miracles of Jesus, undone, right, sort of a spiritual castration here, I see that, I just wasn't sure how it fit into the larger structure of, you know, your "Dissolution of the Patriarchy."

GINA

That wasn't my point.

MAN

Oh?

GINA

It's about fakers. I mean I said that, like, point blank.

PAUL WYLER

Fakers.

GINA

Well, more like, ...contrivance in, I don't know.

MAN

That's not what I read.

GINA

The way we reason we are the way we--

MAN

-and not what this is about—

GINA

It's what I'm about.

MAN

Okay, sure. Performativity. But look-- take a look, just examine your portrayal of all your men here, Gina. Seriously. You say they're being punished-- why do they still have all the lines?

GINA

Men like to talk.

MAN

Well you've got what, morons, or serial abusers, or--

GINA

Except my dad.

MAN

(joking) Except every college girl's dad.

Marilyn snerks.

MARILYN MONROE

Oh he's an asshole.

MAN

And all your women, Gina, they're drugged. Or drunk or--

GINA

(taking the pages from his hand) Well they've gotta do something besides paying attention.

MAN

And that's a choice.

GINA

For who?

MAN

Well, for whom-- for the playwright clearly-- and, and whatever he or she chooses to say...also clearly. But-- not all men are villains. Not all males are what you-- you know-- what you portray here. In here. Some of us are fighting the good fight out there. As allies, as comrades-in-arms, as--as-

For an instant, he admires Marilyn's figure, enough so the audience can see his eyes travel. MARILYN smiles.

MAN

Allies.

GINA

(not buying it) Yeah.

MAN

Anyhow, it's a strong start. Maybe it just needs some shelf time to mature. We need more structure.

MARILYN MONROE

Or maybe less.

GINA

Thanks.

MAN

Oh! And sorry to hear about your mother. I--

GINA

-She didn't die.

MAN

Oh. That would explain all the uh... changes. The email said---

GINA

It's fine.

MAN

Well.

He gives her an awkward and powerless "attagirl" arm punch.

MAN

Put it in the writing! Plumb those depths! Right? It's *process*.

Gina exits off, frustrated.

MAN

(to *Marilyn*) How did I do?

MARILYN MONROE

(*shaking her head sadly*) Oh, sugar.

MAN

Again, maybe?

MARILYN MONROE

Maybe.

MAN

Can I-- can I clap the erasers?

MARILYN MONROE

Maybe after class.

LIGHTS SHIFT TO:

SCENE 6: THE BI-LO SHOP AND SAVE

Terrence Ford stands at the cash register, with his headphones in. In his hand is an inventory printout, which he compares to another print out in his other hand. Today he's listening to Taylor Swift. The worn-out door chime signals a customer. It's Marcy. She is ragged, worn. Ed, in his stained paper bag mask, shambles a short distance behind her.

TERRENCE

(in one breath) Welcome to Bi-Lo, home of instant savings and low, low prices try our peach pie hot pockets just a dollar ninety-nine.

He looks up to see who it is.

TERRENCE

Oh hey, Miss Marcy.

Terrence looks back to his printout.

MARCY

Hi Terrence.

TERRENCE

(still staring at the printout) You sound pretty down, Miss Marcy. We got Odwalla superfood juices in from Ore'gon if you want em. Billy says spirulina makes you high, but I'm pretty sure it's just a regular type of grass.

MARCY

Thank you, Terrence.

TERRENCE

You bet.

MARCY

Terrence? I un-- I actually wanted to talk to you. In person, so.

TERRENCE

Well we're in person now, Ms. Marcy.

MARCY

It's about uh--well, some trouble.

TERRENCE

Ma'am you know I stay outta trouble best I can--

MARCY

No, no. You're not in trouble at all, Terrence. I was just thinkin' bout you...

TERRENCE

Uh, okay. *(Beat.)* Cause you wanna buy some peach pie hot pockets?

MARCY

No, Terrence. I suppose you heard about Paul.

TERRENCE

How he clubbed ol' Ed Hopps to death?

MARCY

Yeah.

TERRENCE

Makes you wonder.

MARCY

Uh yeah. That's it. Just makes you wonder.

ED

(mournfully) Whurrrrrrrrrrm.

TERRENCE

Oh, okay. Well, lemme know if you need help finding anything.

MARCY

You bet, Terrence.

Marcy looks at Ed, shivers. She looks at the wares around the store distractedly, glancing at Terrence every now and then. He begins to whisper a Taylor Swift song to himself.

TERRENCE

(whispering the lyrics from Taylor Swift's "Breathless" to himself)

I'll never judge you

I can only love you

Come now running headlong

Into my arms...

MARCY

Terrence?

TERRENCE

(taking off his headphones) Yes, Miss Marcy?

MARCY

Did you write Donald Duck on your election ballot?

Terrence blinks.

TERRENCE

Uh Maybe. Ain't you not s'posed to ask that?

MARCY

Why did you do that, Terrence? Why did you write Donald Duck?

TERRENCE

I don't know.

MARCY

You don't know? You write *Donald Duck* on your ballot every year. I know it's you.

Marcy brandishes Roy's pistol.

TERRENCE

(terrified) Well--

MARCY

Why? Why do you do it, Terrence?

TERRENCE

Well--

MARCY

Well what?

MARCY

He seemed like the lesser a three evils?

Beat.

MARCY

You mean to tell me, you think *Donald Duck* is evil?

Ed squeals. Marcy shushes him with a finger.

TERRENCE

No?

MARCY

Then why?

TERRENCE

I don't know Miss Marcy-- a joke?

MARCY

(shouting) A joke?!?

Ed tips over a display, or perhaps something stacked.

TERRENCE

Yes, ma'am.

MARCY

And what's the punchline, Terrence? The person who has to disregard your execution of civic duty? That you have oh so casually thrown to the winds of chaos? Is that the punchline? *Me? Is it ME, TERRENCE?!?* The person who's gotta count that wasted goddamn Donald Duck ballot for nothin? Who's spendin' her every. Waking. Hour thinkin' bout the outcome of that stupid election (*pointing to Ed*) followin' her around like a bad stink?!

TERRENCE

I'm sorry Miss Marcy, I just didn't care much for-- for-

MARCY

For WHAT?!?

TERRENCE

For their platforms.

Marcy grabs him across the counter.

MARCY

THEIR PLATFORMS?! THEIR PLATFORMS?! ED IS *DEAD*, TERRENCE! HE'S DEAD, AND PAUL IS IN *JAIL* FOR HIS MURDER DO YOU HEAR ME?!?!

TERRENCE

Yes, ma'am.

Beat.

So I figure I voted right.

Marcy lets him go, slips to a sitting position facing away from him, her back at the counter. Ed shambles over to her, cuddles her in his arms, squeals again, inquiring her state. Marcy shrieks him away, and the bag-headed dead counsel-man lopes cautiously right, two feet away, to sit on his haunches. Marcy begins to cry quietly. A long pause. Terrence gestures to the gun.

TERRENCE

You okay, Miss Marcy?

MARCY

No, Terrence. I'm not.

TERRENCE

(observing her) Yeah.

MARCY

(beat.) Betty Crocker came to me in a vision and told me Ed's mama made cakes from scratch, and that someone else was after me because I'm a cookie in the cosmic oven.

She looks at Terrence squarely. This seems reasonable to Terrence.

MARCY

How do I know if I'm goin' crazy?

TERRENCE

How do you--?

MARCY

Losing my mind.

Ed lets out a low, guttural growl.

TERRENCE

Don't be silly Ms. Marcy you're--

The door chimes and Miss Sharon enters from left. She doesn't see Marcy's gun.

TERRENCE

Welcome to Bi-Lo home of instant savings and low, low prices try our peach pie hot pockets just a dollar ninety-nine.

As Terrence speaks Miss Sharon crosses, quickly assembles her usual collection of tonic water and limes.

TERRENCE

Hi Miss Sharon.

MISS SHARON

Terrence.

TERRENCE

Miss Marcy here's got a gun.

MISS SHARON

(not hearing him) Well, I see the tonic water is still priced at a scandalous--

MARCY

(holding up the pistol) We are having a conversation.

Sharon drops the limes. She hurriedly exits with her tonic as Ed misses a swipe at her. The door chimes.

MARCY

I think I'm losing it, Terrence. But I need to know. What's it like?

TERRENCE

Well... It's a lot of small things. Little pebbles. A shadow here, and a feelin' maybe there. And soon they all pile together into a bigger thing. Maybe. I uh, I don't know, Miss Marcy. It ain't like jumpin' into a lake. But I knew when I got there.

MARCY

You did.

TERRENCE

Oh yeah. Cause things, hidden-- usually lay down flat things -pop up. And you say, oh that ain't right. That woman's lips ain't movin to her voice. Or "why you got two shadows, Dad?" Spiders. And maybe that's the "real real," you know? Hallucinations, or the dark voices ya hear. (*producing the pill bottle*) I'm on the clonapin right now, and it helps. But I still know the unseen stuff-- that it's there.

MARCY

How?

TERRENCE

Cause I saw it once. And you know, I say to myself, "Terrence, the more pills you take, the less what you seen is what you're meant to."

MARCY

How would you know that?

Marcy looks at Ed. He looks back, waves.

TERRENCE

Well even when I take the pills, there's some. But I ignore it all. The shadows and the spiders and-- so I guess that's it. The right thing is to... not see... what you're meant to. Take the pills. And just stop trusting all of it. Be okay.

Terrence nods. He begins to put his headphones back in.

MARCY

Just ignore it.

TERRENCE

Well yeah. (*laughing at himself*) I mean yesterday Marilyn Monroe comes round screamin', lookin' for her *bestie*. And I uh--

Terrence looks at his pills, shrugs. Marcy is stunned.

MARCY

Terrence.

Ed wails.

TERRENCE

What?

MARCY

What did you say?

TERRENCE

I said you just stop lookin' at what you see and just be okay.

MARCY

Marilyn Monroe?

TERRENCE

What?

Marcy stands suddenly. She looks to Ed, who nods emphatically. She looks at Terrence for a solid 5 seconds, trying to figure out what to do. Marcy screams at him, a rage-filled desperate scream, as loud as she can. As she recovers, she hangs her head for a moment.

MARCY

Had everything. Nice job. Loving church. Good heart. Sensible wardrobe. Beautiful family. And wouldn't you know it's all bundled together with a ribbon that just won't stay tied. Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn *FLIPPING* Monroe. (*she laughs nervously*)

Come on, Ed.

Ed mumbles. Marcy starts for the door.

TERRENCE

(*correcting her*) It's-- Terrence. I'm Terrence.

She stops. Turns at a thought.

MARCY

Terrence. What'd you say you were on? Can I see the bottle?

Marcy crosses back to him, takes the bottle as he speaks.

TERRENCE

Well sure, it's a little-- clonapin. An antipsychotic. I'm not though. Psychotic. Just--

MARCY

-And it just--makes you stop caring?

Terrence eyes the bottle in her hands.

TERRENCE

Oh no--

MARCY

-How many you take?

TERRENCE

Well one, twice a day but--

MARCY

-When's your next refill?

TERRENCE

(meaning the label) Right there on the side, you can--

She looks, does the math.

MARCY

Tuesday.

TERRENCE

Yeah I guess, but, uh--can I have that back, Miss Marcy? I need to--

Marcy pops the cap and sloppily fishes out 4 pills, slapping them on the counter.

MARCY

-No, Donald Duck. Oh no; no, you may not.

Marcy takes a mouthful of the pills.

TERRENCE

Wait, what?

Marcy turns on her heel and exits right with the pills. The dying door chime wails her goodbye.

TERRENCE

What? *(calling after her)* Ms. Marcy? That's too many. You got too many. ...Thanks for shopping at Bi-Lo shop and-- *shit*.

The sound of a second door chime after his line (it's Ed following Marcy). Terrence looks up but sees no one.

SCENE X: NOWHERE AND EVERYWHERE

Minimal Lighting, perhaps a single, wide spot.

At center, Marcy is seated in a chair facing the audience, staring out, as if in a trance. Behind her, Betty Crocker slowly brushes Marcy's hair with a golden hairbrush. Betty hums a soothing tune from childhood, perhaps something like "*Hush Little Baby Don't Say A Word.*" On a small table RCenter is a martini bar and an uncompleted chocolate cake, with only half of the red icing piped. The piping bag, next to it, has been split down the middle by Marcy's election stamper, revealing a bloodlike concoction inside. A footstool DCenter.

Just out of the spot, URight, stands Ed, slowly gyrating like a trawling buoy.

BETTY CROCKER

There, there. Doesn't that feel better? You've been all tangled up.

Marilyn Monroe enters from left, the heel of her shoe still damaged.

MARILYN MONROE

Do you mind hurrying this up? I've got canasta upstairs.

BETTY CROCKER

(to Marilyn) Sh. *(to Marcy)* All tangled up. And why wouldn't you be, cupcake? Marcy Beatrice Spiel. Why wouldn't you be plumb tangled up in a world that only wanted you to fill out the frame of a family photo? Stand smiling while he holds the pitchfork. Or the power. Or the ballot box. Mm.

MARILYN MONROE

Oh god.

BETTY CROCKER

(to Marilyn) Do you mind?

MARILYN MONROE

So long as I get a swing at her when we're done.

BETTY CROCKER

Honey, you get too hot and I swear all that plastic's gonna melt right out of your face.

MARILYN MONROE

Get bent, cake-eater.

Betty resumes brushing Marcy's hair.

BETTY CROCKER

Hydrogen, Helium, Lithium. Five parts protons, six part neutrons, and just enough zing to stick.

Marilyn begins to make herself a martini.

MARILYN MONROE

(to herself) I'll melt you.

BETTY CROCKER

That was the first recipe, Marcy. And it was neither up nor down, top nor bottom, not charmed or strange. It merely was. There was no mother, no father, no sister, no brother. We were all everything, just like this little knot of yours.

Marcy begins to slowly raise the gun to her head. Betty kneels by her and gently pulls the hand back down.

BETTY CROCKER

No no. You and Miss Temper Tantrum over there have to make peace first.

MARILYN MONROE

(jerking a thumb over to Ed) Don't forget Mumbles.

She pours the drink and crosses to pick up the stool.

BETTY CROCKER

I wouldn't dare forget our friend, Mr. Hopps. *(with a wink)* Edward, would you like to join us?

As Marilyn speaks, Ed crosses to Marcy's feet, circling before he sits there, like a dog might.

MARILYN MONROE

(bringing the stool to Marcy and sitting in the wide stance of a baseball player) Okay Marcy Spiel. Brass tacks. Little over 60 years ago little Norma Jean has a rough kinda night. The kind most wouldn't let slip in polite company. It was--

BETTY CROCKER

-Methylbutanone, Chloral Hydrate, Sodium Ox--

MARILYN MONROE

Will you can it, already?

BETTY CROCKER

Mm.

MARILYN MONROE

(hissing at her) Fffs --The same kind of last call Mickey you've doozied yourself up with. *(now bragging)* 'cept I had the presence of mind to consider my staging. Drawn out in a four post bed, bosom to heaven; downstage arm lifted just so, as if to say "I'm done being Cleopatra, bring me another asp, you nancies."

The orchestra surges, camera one tightens just so-- then a gradual fade closing on the one face this side of Troy that can still bring nations acrumble. I died a goddess.

BETTY CROCKER

Be honest.

MARILYN MONROE

Why?

BETTY CROCKER

Because you'll get your petty revenge.

MARILYN MONROE

My tits were infected *(she shoots Betty a dirty look, a "Are you happy?" shrug)*. Eat your heart out, Betty. I was carved out like a Thanksgiving turkey, and in the process they took something they shouldn't have.

BETTY CROCKER

(singing and brushing) Get to itttt---

Marilyn stands.

MARILYN MONROE

Fine. And then there was a whirl and a buzz and all that white light nonsense, and come to find out I'd been made.

No pearly gates, no flaming Dr. Pepper, just blue Hawaii and the sweetest boy I'd ever met, holding that thing they'd taken in his two hands like a corsage for the fall formal.

BETTY CROCKER

(saccharine, teasing) You found Jesus.

MARILYN MONROE

I found *Jazzy*.

Marilyn downs the martini in a gulp. Betty steps forward, addressing Marcy.

BETTY CROCKER

Until you, pumpkin pie, dispatched him into the night. Like so much flour out the pantry window. Undoubtedly our *Jazzy* was sure to impart some divine token unto faithful you, Marcy. A sweet morsel of "Go Get 'Em Team!" *(beat.)* And you took it.

MARCY

(sadly, dreamily) I took what?

BETTY CROCKER

All of it. Every last word. Like I said, Cookie, you bit the baker. And you may not feel it, but the whole factory: it's falling down. Grinding to a slow inexorable halt. Like the pilot light's out--the mixers, the makers, the candlestick cardinals-- cracking, crumbling, unspeaking their magic words into bupkis with a lemony pop. I mean, I'm plumb forgetting their names, honeybunch. Just you now, Marcy. Mercy, Marcy. You, magic, you.

MARCY

What do I do? Whaddo I do--?

BETTY CROCKER

--Everything now. *(turning to Ed)* But first a lady pays her debts. Isn't that right, Ed?

Ed shambles to his feet with a grumble. Marcy begins to hyperventilate.

MARCY

What? What do I pay?

Betty Crocker nods and steps back out of the light, shushing Marcy as a mother might soothe a baby to sleep.

Ed raises his shaking hand like a gun, and as he does so, Marcy's hand with the pistol rises too.

MARCY

Why's he doing that-- why's he doing that??

BETTY CROCKER

(receding) We'll start from scratch.

MARCY

What?!

MARILYN MONROE

(to Marcy) It's a twofer, ya tart.

MARILYN MONROE

(to Betty) You said I'd get a lick at 'er.

MARCY

No! I said I was sorry! It was a mistake! I swear it! I SWEAR I DIDN'T MEAN TO KILL HIM! HE'S A MONSTER, YOU SEE HIM--

Ed growls a deep angry rumbly growl. The hand gun and pistol shake in both their hands as it is clear Marcy has some control over the situation. Though she cannot stand, she grabs the gun with her other hand, wrestling with it.

Marilyn walks back to mix another martini, but still watches with interest.

BETTY CROCKER

(from the darkened stage) Every cake needs a little oven time, Marcy.

BETTY CROCKER

You're almost there.

MARCY

I'M JUST A SILLY LITTLE PERSON-- I--
- I DIDN'T MEAN TO--

MARILYN MONROE

(to Ed) Just shoot her, Mumbles.

Marcy struggles as she screams.

MARCY

WHAT?! NONONO! HELP ME, I DIDN'T MEAN TO!!! PLEASE! PLEASE! I'M A MOM! I'M A MOMMY, A MOMMY! I HAVE KIDS!! A LITTLE GIR-HURR-HURRL-- I WAS JUST TRYING TO DO MY BEST TO--

A gunshot fires. BLACKOUT. The stage lights flicker back on. Betty Crocker and Ed are gone. Marcy lays on the floor, a bullet in her brain, clutches the paper bag in her hand, and the spent pistol in the other. Marilyn walks over to her, snatches the bag and places the martini mixer in it. She takes a sidelong glance at Marcy.

MARILYN MONROE

It still smells like housewife in here.

Marilyn spills a little martini to deodorize the room. Samples the air. It's better, she decides. She grabs the bottle in her free hand and walks to the door.

MARILYN MONROE

(to Marcy's body) I'm still steaming, for what it's worth.
(beat.) Ugh. Clean yourself up for Act II.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1: THE PULPIT, DISINTEGRATING

Pastor Meredith stands at the wooden podium from the previous scene. Miss Sharon sits beside her, having just finished a song.

PASTOR MEREDITH

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Here ends the reading.

CONGREGATION

Praise be to God.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Many of you, friends, have come to me lately, asking why it feels like God is no longer listening. To your prayers, to your heart-- why it sometimes feels like you are-- alone, adrift on the ocean with no land in sight. Three weeks ago, I told you a story of my father, Alan Meredith, and how even in the richness of our lives, we are called to give all to the church.

How the seeming impossibility, of giving back to the Lord the blessings of wealth and time and freedom, is the only way to salvation. These words from James, they present to us the same dilemma. Can I be this, and still that? A wealthy Christian, while my neighbors hunger? How might I ask God for faith with pockets weighed heavy by a perfectly rational doubt?

Miss Sharon nods affirmatively. Pastor Meredith places a hand to her head nervously. Something changes in her demeanor.

PASTOR MEREDITH

And uh, I don't know. I really don't know. I want to comfort you-- to tell you that you can have both, but... (*disconnecting, looking far away*) Friends.

Beat.

I've been having these dreams-- and normally I don't; normally I'm so heavy a sleeper, you could drive a freight train through... But they've been so real. And-- And I'm in bed in the dream, and my mother, who died when I was small, she's in the room with me -- she's so old-- older than she was when she passed.

Meredith look out into the audience, trancelike.
She is lost to the dream.

(she laughs nervously) And she asks me, “Where’s your father?” And I say, “in heaven, Mama” and she looks at me with *so* much distaste, and she says “*you* put him there, didn’t you?” And I deny it. I try so hard to deny it, “I tried to keep him *here!*” I say. “Here with *me!*” But she won’t listen and she begins to crumble in front of me, and has that look on her face like the time I asked her why I can’t help but like girls instead of boys-- and she says “Oh for fuck’s sake *Jenny*, oh for fuck’s sake, you wanna burn in hell?”

And I tell her “No! No, Mama, *I don’t!*” And through her eyes I see-- I see heaven crack in half from the top to the bottom, and both halves fall, they tumble into the ocean and leave behind this gaping void that *hisses* into darkness, my name, *Jenny Meredith* and the names of all my congregation, in front and behind it, falling into nothing, and oh Lord, I am *glad!* *Because the wait for the end is over. THANK MARCY!*

Pastor Meredith shivers violently, surprised she’s spoken the thoughts aloud. She sees the dismayed faces of her congregation in the audience, realizes her error in speaking so personally, knows she is done for.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Oh-- oh no. I’m -- I was-- Oh God. I’m so sorry-- I didn’t mean to-- uh-. Here--uh, oh folks, I’m-- I’m so sorry. Here ends the lesson--

She exits hurriedly.

CONGREGATION

Praise... be-- to-- *(murmuring questions and shock)*

Miss Sharon stands, not knowing what to do, then sits, then stands, then sits, pretending to mind her own business.

LIGHTS SHIFT TO:

SCENE 2: MARCY'S HEART

A split stage. On one plane: A waiting room UR, awash in reddish light. Two chairs face each other. In one sits Marcy Spiel, in a red dress, fit for dancing, her eyes closed. On a yoga mat on the floor, completing a Cosmo Sex in the City Quiz, is Paul Wyler (hereafter referred to as Jesusy Paul), dressed as the iconic white Jesus of 1970s revivalist paintings-- including a white robe and sandals. He wears a fun fanny pack, and munches on a small bag of Buffalo Combos, eating them with a pair of chopsticks. A small end table with a red lava lamp pulses as a relaxed heartbeat might, though not enough to distract from the overhead schema. Also on the end table, a small box. On plane two, in a blue darkness, Marilyn Monroe sits on the floor in a child's party dress, a large red ball in her lap. Standing at the opposite end of the stage from her, stands Betty Crocker in the blue gingham dress of a dustbowl bride, holding a mixing bowl with head bowed. Neither move, but their silhouettes are ever-present. They are seen and heard by Jesusy Paul, who attempts to ignore them, but never by Marcy.

Completing the Quiz, Jesusy Paul tabulates his results.

JESUSY PAUL

No *WAY* am I a friggin' Samantha. No WAY.

He chuffs. Marcy awakens silently, in a suddenness. Jesusy Paul notices.

JESUSY PAUL

(not looking, with quiet sardonicism) You're up. Yay.

Marcy blinks, looks.

MARCY

Paul?

JESUSY PAUL

(as if in a soap opera) No, I'm his twin brother, Conrad. Paul's pregnant, in a coma!

MARCY

A coma??

JESUSY PAUL

Oh god-- I'm not Paul. Hold on.

Jesusy Paul carefully rolls the combos up, unzips his fanny pack, and deposits both the chopsticks and combos within, replacing them with a wet nap. He opens it and scrubs his hands furiously.

JESUSY PAUL

(to himself) God forbid the guy who gets manhandled by every scabby street urchin who've never even WASHED THEIR HANDS after they use the bathroom--

MARCY

J--Jesus?

JESUSY PAUL

Yes! What?

MARCY

Lord? It's you? You're-- you're Jesus Christ?

JESUSY PAUL

What, you thought I was the grape-juice guy? Who you framed for murder? I mean, that's good, there's something *there*, lotta grape action between us, but no. No. And yes.

He completes cleaning as he speaks, depositing everything in the fanny pack.

JESUSY PAUL

(looking at his cuticles) Ugh, it gets under your nails. I love combos, but it's like triple the prep of a lobster dinner, right? You've had the Buffalo, right? Of course not. I'll say this-- they. Are. Sublime-- hard to find in stores but I bought like six cases off the Dark Web from somewhere in the Ukraine-- like Vladivostok or-- I don't know-

Marcy gently slaps him.

JESUSY PAUL

Don't-- hit me.

MARCY

You're real.

JESUSY PAUL

Of course I'm real.

MARCY

(thinking herself nuts, then probing for the bullet hole) I shot myself. I shot myself in the head with Roy's service pistol after I-- after I took Terrence's pills, and I shot myself to keep Ed from haunting me for the rest of-- Betty Crocker and Marilyn- after they made me-- *(she claps a hand to her mouth)* And now I'm seeing Jesus, but he's got Paul's face on him-- okay, okay, Marcy, don't have a conniption.

A moment. She bats at him again.

JESUSY PAUL

I said stop it! One would think being pureed with an election stamper filled some kind of quota. Now listen--

MARCY

Lord, I--I killed you.

Jesusy Paul goes to roll up the yoga mat.

JESUSY PAUL

Yes, I recall some of it. Blacked out the murderous rage in your crazy eyeballs, but now that I see them again, what with you blinking at me like a lost cow on the highway, it's all coming back, unfortunately.

Marcy falls to her knees.

MARCY

Lord Jesus. Oh my Jesus. Oh Heavenly Father, please forgive me-- I fall at your throne in the sight of your-I am so, so unworthy even to kneel in your presence. Lord forgive me-- Jesus Lord-I was a fool, a piteous fool to even--

JESUSY PAUL

Stop it. We are beyond that. Marcy, listen to me. Listen. Will you get up for a moment and-- I can't even- *(placing a hand on her head)* STOP IT, LISTEN TO ME.

MARCY

Ed was trying to rip the ballot box out of my hands, and I knew what he had on his mind; I knew he was up to some bad business--you have to understand me. I didn't ever, I don't ever want to hurt anyone-- and lord I would never--

Jesus looks at the hand he's placed on her. He curses silently and pulls out another wet nap.

MARCY

(dubious) Is this-- is this heaven?

JESUSY PAUL

Are you kidding? We're not getting a blood test, honey, this is your HEART.

MARCY

My heart.

JESUSY PAUL

Yeah it's a waiting room. I don't even know.

Marcy looks at him quizzically.

JESUSY PAUL

You gave me a key?

MARCY

To my--

JESUSY PAUL

To your *heart*, yes, it's literal and I brought a toothbrush, okay, but here's the deal-- Can you please go sit down? You're making me so nervous right now, I just keep picturing you swinging.

She does.

MARCY

Why are we in my heart?

JESUSY PAUL

I don't *know*. *Okay?* I DON'T KNOW. I should be alive, and revving up the new Eden, but instead, I'm here, stuck in your rotting womanflesh "heart" like a Kentucky Fried glob of whatever you people eat. And that's the worry, lady. Is the stuck. So, let's just rehash why you need to unstuck me because--

MARCY

-The last thing I remember, I shot myself in the head with Roy's pistol.

JESUSY PAUL
I'm talking here. And I'm trying to ask
you--

MARCY
-I took all of Terrence's meds.

JESUSY PAUL
Will you-- please just let me ask you a
simple question for once--

MARCY
That's not suicide is it? Is that just a
Catholic thing? Oh Lord, are you
Catholic?

JESUSY PAUL
HOW DID YOU MURDER ME, YOU CRAZY PERSON?!?

Beat.

MARCY
It was an accident.

JESUSY PAUL
So... what, am I really done, then? Four upsidaisies for ol' Jazzy and you're gonna pull
the plug? Is that "the buzz" Marcy Spiel?!? Is that's what's "a-happening"?!?

MARCY
Forgive me Father for I have--

JESUSY PAUL
You have NO idea do you?

She stops.

MARCY
No idea of what?

JESUSY PAUL
Election day, Marcy.

MARCY
Yes, sir?

JESUSY PAUL
All across the country, your *Christian* country, it was *election* day.

MARCY
Yes, Sir.

JESUSY PAUL

I have to spell this out? *Election Day*? Where people are *CHOSEN??*

MARCY

Well, yes Lord but--

JESUSY PAUL

Whose name was on the ballots?

MARCY

But I don't understand what that--

JESUSY PAUL

Mine was. For everything.

Marcy stands and crosses to him.

MARCY

Not just Davy?

JESUSY PAUL

No. Not just Davy. Have you *heard* of the SECOND COMING, Marcy Spiel?

MARCY

I have. But I thought you were--

A blue stab of light to Betty and Marilyn. Betty looks wistfully out the window.

BETTY CROCKER

-Stepping out for a pack of smokes.

JESUSY PAUL

(pulling out another wet nap and cleaning compulsively) Oh goody, it's an ensemble show.

MARCY

What?

Marilyn looks up at Betty.

JESUSY PAUL

I was coming back MARCY-- I was COMING BACK! THAT WAS IT! THAT MOMENT! I WAS COMING BACK FOR THE SECOND COMING-- UNTIL YOU ASSAULTED ME INTO NOTHING!

MARCY
 But you never--

MARILYN MONROE
(in a childlike pout) Came back.

JESUSY PAUL
 I never what?!?

MARILYN MONROE
 To see me grow up.

MARCY
 No! There were supposed to be--signs, we were supposed to get blood and locusts and--

JESUSY PAUL
 How about my name on every ballot ever on a multinational election holiday? I gave you-

BETTY CROCKER
 Nothing, in the end.

JESUSY PAUL
 EVERYTHING!

BETTY CROCKER
(looking wistfully out a non-existent window, to Marilyn) I'm sorry honey.

MARCY
 Lord--

MARILYN MONROE
 A loss maybe.

JESUSY PAUL
 EVERYTHING! HOW MUCH MORE OBVIOUS COULD I HAVE BEEN?!?

BETTY CROCKER
 It would have been so easy.

JESUSY PAUL
 And you blew it.

MARCY
 Lord Jesus, I never meant to hurt you. I didn't know--

JESUSY PAUL

That I was coming back to save all mankind, a second time, like I've been saying for all of, oh, forever, in a new Eden of eternal wonder- DO YOU- you have any idea how much energy it takes to come back, Marcy? I put everything into that--EVERYTHING- do you know how hard it is for the author of life to illustrate HIMSELF, again, all I had to go through *(to himself)* my GOD, JAZZY, is she even listening--?

BETTY CROCKER

The squeal of the screen door at 2AM-- that's what I have. You know I was hell on wheels with a lathe, but I never used it the way you could've. Knuckles ready to redden on a bench engine swollen with dishwater, with soap for cleaning up messes; fingertips for darning. While you sent a 99 cent card stained from goddamn Pall-Malls. No check, no--

JESUSY PAUL AND BETTY CROCKER

HELLO!?!

MARCY

Lord, I didn't know.

Marilyn rolls the ball. It stops halfway across the stage. All dialogue from here streams together, flowing into each other at a lively clip.

MARILYN MONROE

I want to be a soldier--

BETTY CROCKER

-You can't be.

JESUSY PAUL

(crossing away from her) Do you know why I chose you?

MARILYN MONROE

-King of Diamonds taped to my helmet-

JESUSY PAUL

Marcy Spiel?

BETTY CROCKER

-We're good for waiting--

MARCY

Oh Lord, I can't imagine--

MARILYN MONROE

Steel in straw villages--

JESUSY PAUL
You're salt of the earth.

BETTY CROCKER
I miss it.

Marilyn bounces her ball in place.

MARILYN MONROE
Bullets and white phosphorus--

JESUSY PAUL
And I rely on people like you to carry my standard when I'm not around.

MARILYN MONROE
And when they gaze in horror, I'll cock my little head and say--

MARILYN MONROE
"Now *that's* how you look at me."

JESUSY PAUL
On-- (*to Marilyn*) Will you shut up?!?- (*to Marcy*) On *you*.

MARCY
Oh Lord, I do that, I do. I follow your teaching. I love my family and go to church every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, I read my scriptures, I raise my Gina up to you every night in prayer, and it's just-- I've been going-- *crazy*, Lord, Jesus. My head is--See, Ed was trying to rip the ballot box out of my hands, and I knew what he had on his mind; I *knew* he was up to some bad business-- you have to understand-- I didn't ever, I wouldn't ever want to hurt anyone-- and Lord I would *never*--

JESUSY PAUL
-Club me over the head with an election stamper eleven times? *Twice?* On my triumphant return?

MARCY
Lord, I'm so, so sorry!

BETTY CROCKER
In the beginning was a girl.

MARCY
I swear it, I don't know what's come over me. Heal this mind of mine. I been seeing terrible things-- monsters and movie stars and Betty Crocker, and they wanted me to, I think; I think they wanted me to.

Betty mixes in her bowl.

BETTY CROCKER
Who grew alone.

JESUSY PAUL
They wanted you to what?

MARILYN MONROE

Into what?

MARCY

...To be more than-- than I am.

BETTY CROCKER

She was formless and empty.

JESUSY PAUL

That's ridiculous, Marcy; you're nothing without me-

BETTY CROCKER

--And she hovered over the waters.

JESUSY PAUL

Don't you want "Tina" to have the same relationship with me you did? Don't you want her to feel the overwhelming love you feel when you think about me, when you follow my commandments? The power to do anything through me--

BETTY CROCKER

Until I said "No."

JESUSY PAUL

-through my name, that is worthy?

MARCY

You mean Gina.

BETTY CROCKER

And saw--

JESUSY PAUL

Yeah, Gina. Look, Marcy, I won't mince words here, because I used all my power to return, and we're talking "*the* return," and then to return *again*, which you ruined, okay, and I mean ALL the power I have, and I uh, I'm almost out of juice. Alright? I need the juice to come back. To bring back paradise on earth. I run on power, you understand?

But for some reason, uh, you have it now.

MARILYN MONROE

A terrifying reflection.

Marilyn and Betty exit.

Beat.

MARCY

I do.

JESUSY PAUL

(pulling out another wet-nap, using it) So I need you to give it back. Because-- because you love me.

Long Beat.

MARCY

I shot myself yesterday.

MARCY

It was cold. I've held many, you know, many guns, but never with-- with the intention to--

JESUSY PAUL

You were confused, and maybe thought that--

MARCY

-to get something out of *me*. A bad seed. A sour ingredient. *(inspired)* What if we remake it together, Lord? You can stay here in my heart, and I can be the vessel of your handiwork-- of your love--

JESUSY PAUL

Be your puppet. Right.

Jesus picks up a magazine and reads.

MARCY

No! No, we can share it all. I'm sure Roy wouldn't mind lettin' you steer him for a while and we could, well Lord, we could maybe bring Marilyn and Betty along, and maybe even Ed if he promises to--

JESUSY PAUL

Are you insane?

MARCY

But then maybe we could just talk to one another again like you used to when I was a little girl and you would speak to me in the middle of--

JESUSY PAUL

What? I never said jack to you.

MARCY

But you told me to get baptized. And to marry Roy.

JESUSY PAUL

Uhh, no. The only person I've *ever* had a goddamn conversation with is Terrence Fucking Ford.

MARCY

Terrence Ford?

JESUSY PAUL

Yeah I love that kid. (*in his best Donald Duck voice*) You're going crazy Terrence! (*he laughs*) Donald Duck, right?

Marcy stops, looks to the audience and ever so slightly quivers.

MARCY

Get out.

JESUSY PAUL

What?

MARCY

Get out.

JESUSY PAUL

Are you serious? What you think you can do God all by yourself, Marcy, is that it? Because I'm not the part you shot out of yourself, lady, I'm the bullet, you understand.

MARCY

Get out.

JESUSY PAUL

Marcy-- no no Marcy-Marcy. Do you even realize what you're stepping into? The mantle? Marcy? There's no golden throne, alright? No angels, no trumpets, okay? There's NOT. It's *nothing* like that. You wanna know, Marcy, you wanna know what being God is like?

It's soundless.

A quiet so devoid of sound that in the dark, Marcy, you start to imagine what's not making noise behind that star, heh.

What's coiling silently in every leathery shadow, poised, ready to wrap its tail around the neck of your eternity of hushed static dread, and you know the worst part, Marcy? There IS no recipe. Okay? It's *chaos*. Marilyn, Betty, Ed, they don't *know*, and they can't know because they didn't nudge it into being-- because God has to act to make sound, to be heard, to BE God or he's not, and everything you do, every motion, every appearance, every movement is an expenditure, do you understand, a sap of quite exhaustible, but infinitely inexhaustible you. God bleeds forever.

(sinking) So--so you have to hide in the dark to preserve yourself, to try and restore in the same way you have to still be seen and be, and *that's* why I've been gone, Marcy. Is that what you want? To fear and wane forever?

Beat.

Look I need it. Please.

MARCY

I love you. I'm sorry, but I love you. Get out.

Lightning crackles. Thunder. The heart bulb begins to pulse faster. Jesusy Paul looks for its source and hurries offstage, exiting.

Marcy closes her eyes for a moment, walks upstage and opens the small box on the end table. She opens it.

Inside is a pink packet of Easy Bake Oven Pecan Sandie mix. She opens it and pours the contents on stage.

SCENE 3: FIRST PRESBYTERIAN, REFORMED/OUT OF TIME

Lights up on stage. Meredith, Sharon, Marilyn Monroe. All are seated. An empty chair to the left of PM. Chairs arranged as they might be in group therapy. The pulpit, off to the side, now features a crest of an election stamper and a pistol. Sunlight and birdsong pour from a hole in the roof. Instead of her normal vestments, Meredith wears jeans and a t-shirt. Sharon, with a guitar slung across her knee, finishes singing the last verse of a Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now*.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Thank you, Sister Sharon. I hear you, and I see you. How is everyone?

MISS SHARON

Good.

MARILYN MONROE

Peachy keen.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Good. I uh, I've been nervous about coming back here. It's strange. Rebuilding. But here we are. And I want to congratulate Sharon on four days of sobriety.

CONGREGATION

Congratulations, Sharon.

SHARON

Thank you.

PASTOR MEREDITH

And uh, with your permission, I'd like to say a few words.

CONGREGATION

By Marcy we shall listen.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Thanks. I'll be as brief as my reputation suggests.

Laughter.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Sisters. Not one year ago, I spoke to you from that pulpit, in what I would then call “a spirit of fear.” Our world was splintering and falling apart, and with it, my ability to speak with a liar’s tongue. I uh, I believed I was the bride of our times, given to a groom my parents promised would treat me well.

Betty Crocker enters with a tray of rice krispie treats. She offers them to Meredith, who refuses politely, and Sharon, who takes two.

The book and the rules were off-limits. Unkind to women, and especially women like me. Clean the house. Rear the children. Smile when company is over. Love a man.

Betty exits.

You know, the proof we couldn’t find in that book, we found in others-- a code, an organization to keep us happy and in line. I--I preached to you about it, imagining myself written to the margins and in between lines that speak of the virtue in subordination, the secret glory of the dominated, and how we, the maids of our time, must give thanks for it. Because. Well because we loved him. And he may have been perfect, he may have been, but an uncorrected omission, is-- You know, in the robes of a priestess, in those vestments given to me under the auspices of divine love, I told you that bowing with me was not servitude but freedom. And I am so sorry.

Birdsong. Warm sunbeams.

Because under the strain of that freedom, brothers and sisters, the entire world cracked in two. You saw it Eleanor. Bille. Gloria. You saw it, Gene, right in the middle of the service. Our cities fell to the pit of the earth, and the sky ripping top to bottom curled like a ribbon, didn’t they? The moulding on this very church began to splinter and fall, and I looked, and I didn’t see anyone bowing. But I felt hope. Is that so wrong? It still feels so wrong.

Suddenly Roy enters through the theatre, filthy, wearing little beyond a dirty loincloth. He has mud smeared across his face, a makeshift haversack on his shoulder. In one hand, he carries a pistol. In another a spear.

ROY

Alright, this is a-- a stick-up! Another one. And this time I’ve got bullets! At least five of ‘em, so you dirty hippy witches can think twice before you put your weird woman hex on my person.

MAN (O.S.)

Hi Roy!

ROY

Quiet, this isn't about you.

MISS SHARON

(tired) Hi Roy. It Wednesday already?

ROY

OF COURSE IT'S WEDNESDAY?!? WHERE'S MY WIFE, YOU-- HARPY?!

PASTOR MEREDITH

Roy, we're not holding anyone hostage. And I've told you, Marcy is here, listening to me and she listens to you. Nothing's changed, we're just all on equal footing now.

MISS SHARON

Harpy?

ROY

Woman, I-I cast you down in the name of--
thou-- thou speaketh with a forked tongue!

MISS SHARON

Honey, you gotta let it go.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Let him talk.

MISS SHARON

Maybe he'll tire himself out.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Roy, what do you wanna say?

Birdsong.

ROY

That I know what kinda operation you're running, and what kinda night dancing sacrilege you've got holed up in here-- and, and I'll- I'll shoot every last one of you if I have to!

Birdsong.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Why?

ROY

Because through Him, I can be and say whatever I wanna say!

MISS SHARON

Well. Who's to argue? Now say your piece.

Meredith nods. Roy lowers the gun. Beat.

ROY

She okay?

PASTOR MEREDITH

She says she is.

ROY

She says--

PASTOR MEREDITH

I think. (*the others in the circle, the audience*) They think.

Beat.

ROY

I miss her.

Beat.

SHARON

Sure you do, honey. But she's right here, in the room with us.

ROY

Tell her to come home?

SHARON

Oh look at yourself. Torn all your clothes to scrap. Roy. I know you're outta the house; where you keepin'?

ROY

In the oak tree up by the old Bi-Lo.

PASTOR MEREDITH

The oak tree?

ROY

I made myself a little, uh--

SHARON

(mouthing the words with concern to Meredith) He's livin' in a tree.

ROY

-A nest, I guess.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Roy, you don't need to rough it out in a nest. Nothing changed but--

Roy raises the gun again.

ROY

Everything changed.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Don't you want to see Marcy, Roy?

Roy reignites his anger.

ROY

That's Deputy Roy fucking Spiel to you! Now give me back my wife!

SHARON

(standing up and walking out) Well, he's hysterical.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Sharon, please.

ROY

WHERE IS SHE?!!YOU LEMME SEE HER!

Beat.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Sure. *(to offstage)* Betty, is there any news?

Betty Crocker enters, wheeling Marcy in a wheelchair beside the pulpit. All of Marcy's head is covered in gauze except for her mouth. As she reaches the pulpit, Betty kneels and folds Marcy's hands, kissing them, then kneels beside her. Pastor Meredith leads the congregation with the next spoken line.

PASTOR MEREDITH/CONGREGATION

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear, in faith and pursuit.

Marcy's speaks soundlessly, words without voice. For a full minute, the only sound is the disquieting sibilance of Marcy's mouth and tongue. Finally, she quiets, and nods matter of factly. Roy collapses at her feet and cries quietly.

PASTOR MEREDITH

Now, take these words and un-words and emblazon them upon the walls of your heart, with our daughters and sons and with our loved ones, that they may be revealed in the light of the ballot box, in the blood of Ed Hopps. Praise be to Marcy; praise be to Us.

CONGREGATION

And Roy.

PASTOR MEREDITH

That's very nice. Yes, and Roy. And Gina who's gone off to college. Praise be. Amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

SCENE 5: THE BI-LO SUPERSAVE

The Bi-Lo Shop and Save has changed dramatically since last we visited. A new coat of paint has been applied to everything. The register is gone, and the dingy counter now features bowls of grains, labelled accordingly. Terrence Ford stands at his counter. A flash of paparazzi lights off stage. Marilyn Monroe enters from right in her *Some Like It Hot* dress. The stain is still visible. Terrence is alarmed, but still recites his sales-mantra.

TERRENCE

Welcome to the Community Garden, would you like to try a wholesome medley of roasted vegetables over quinoa--

MARILYN MONROE

Hi Terrence.

TERRENCE

I'mma be honest I don't know what quinoa is-- I think some kinda eggs, but--now everything's free here, and well, them apples over there keep filling up on their own once a body takes one, so I don't know why I got a job really, cause there ain't nothin' to rotate, but-- but I can't find no one to ask cause everyone leaves me well enough alone.

MARILYN MONROE

I said "hi Terrence."

TERRENCE

Hello, Mrs. Monroe.

MARILYN MONROE

Miss.

Beat.

TERRENCE

I looked up Arthur Miller.

MARILYN MONROE

Oh did you?

TERRENCE

Yes.

MARILYN MONROE

Well, lemme tell you, Terrence. Arthur--he was just *awful* at ringing up items. Did you know that? About Arthur Miller?

TERRENCE

No.

MARILYN MONROE

Not like you.

TERRENCE

I'm alarmed; I'm just gonna say it.

MARILYN MONROE

Terrence. (*leaning on his counter seductively*) Marcy has remembered you. She's sorry she took your pills.

TERRENCE

Oh-- oh yeah?

Marilyn turns on the sex appeal.

MARILYN MONROE

Yeah. And I'm sorry too. I shouldn'ta yelled at you like I did. I was in a spirited passion, Terrence.

TERRENCE

Umm. Okay, sure.

MARILYN MONROE

A fiery one.

TERRENCE

Okay.

MARILYN MONROE

So, I wonder, now that the dust has settled, if there's any way I could make amends. I wonder "if Terrence Ford could have *an-y-thing* he wanted," I wonder "what would he ask for?"

TERRENCE

Like, like you're a genie?

MARILYN MONROE

(throwing some sex on it) Like, like I'm a goddess.

TERRENCE

Like with... wishes?

MARILYN MONROE

Maybe. What kind of wish do you think Marilyn Monroe, star of stage and screen, the goddess of spirit, and love, and especially of *sex*, grant better-than-Arthur-Miller-at-ringing-up-items-Terrence Ford?

Beat.

TERRENCE

Make me sing like Katy Perry?

Beat.

MARILYN MONROE

What.

TERRENCE

Like after she made Teenage Dream, but before Prism? Cause honestly, it sounds like she's been smoking cigars after that? And I was thinking'--

MARILYN MONROE

-I'm Marilyn fucking Monroe.

TERRENCE

So.

MARILYN MONROE

Really?

TERRENCE

What?

MARILYN MONROE

Katy Perry. You want to sing like Katy Perry.

Terrence blinks.

TERRENCE

But before--

MARILYN MONROE

Prism. I got it. Jesus-- Marcy. Whatever. Fine.

The intro to *Last Friday Night* by Katy Perry vamps, and red and pink lights flash on stage. Terrence, excited, prepares an impromptu music video dance number. At the music the entire cast takes a curtain call and dances out to Katy Perry. They strike the set as they leave, and LIGHTS FADE OUT.

SCENE B: THE STAGE. NOW EMPTY.

After twenty seconds of stage black, LIGHTS RISE on an empty stage.

ED, in a jumpsuit, sweeps the stage. He bears a bandaid on his forehead. GINA enters through the house, clutching a ticket. Gina realizes she's late.

GINA

Oh damnit, Gina, what the actual eff.

ED

Can I help you?

GINA

Sorry, I thought the play would still be-- going. I guess.

ED

Nah. Seven to nine. All done.

GINA

Oh--

ED

And most of the actors are older, so.

GINA

So-- what does that mean?

ED

I don't know. You figure they'd be taking care of kids. Instead of flittin' around on-- ah whatever.

GINA

How was the show?

ED

Fine. Weird.

GINA

Yeah? Yeah.

ED

Well, I'm done here, so...

GINA

I've been away at college. At Stanford. It's just strange to be back. Thought I might see someone familiar.

ED

Well, keep looking. It's just me.

GINA

I'm Gina. My uh, my mother ascended to godhood, and my dad's living in a tree.

ED

Oh. You wrote this play?

GINA

I did.

ED

Coulda given Marilyn more to do.

GINA

Oh, uh, sure.

ED

And who won the election?

GINA

I'm sorry?

ED

You never say who won.

GINA

I don't know.

ED

What?

GINA

I don't know who won.

ED looks at his keys.

ED

Alright. (*walking away, mumbling*) Write an election play, don't tell the damn audience who won the damn---

GINA

-Is it okay if I hang out for a little bit?

ED

Oh sure. I'm just finishing up in--- Wait. You're Gina.

GINA

Yeah, that's what I said.

ED

Hold, please.

He exits briefly and comes back with the small box from Marcy's heart. He gives it to her.

GINA

So, this isn't weird.

ED

One of the actors left that for ya.

GINA

Thanks.

ED

I opened it, case it was drugs. It wasn't.

GINA

Again, I can't express my gratitude.

ED

Well you're young, it'll come. Uhh, I'm done in here. Pretty sure you gotta go, but I don't really care either way.

GINA

Can I hang out just for a minute? I knew the cast, so I was hoping I'd see them, but if I can just-- hang that'd be--

ED

-Close the doors. (*throwing a thumb at the ceiling*) You want these lights?

Nono. It's fine.

GINA

(exiting) I'll leave one on.

ED

He leaves. As he does so, Gina opens the box. She pulls out a bundle of gauze-- unwrapped from Marcy's head. She carefully unwraps the ball of dressings; at the middle is an election stamper, stained red. Gina catches her breath.

She returns to the box and finds a small card, reading an inscription written on there aloud, each word deliberate.

GINA
"Count. Every. One. *(beat.)* Love, Mama."

Gina folds her hand around the stamper decisively, holding it like a dagger reliquary-- a weapon, *the* weapon. She slowly raises her gaze to the audience, and nods suddenly as music fades in. CUT TO BLACK while the music swells.

END OF PLAY.

AFTERWORD

Introduction

Only in this last draft have I stumbled across the metaphor of God and Jesus as an absentee father, due to hopefully return. It seems to have been the mechanism that's snapped much of the play into place, though there are so *many* of these mechanisms now that I often feel like each edit displaces another cog in the watch. It has certainly focused *The Write-In's* sights on Christianity, and until a rigorous workshop takes place, I don't know that the work will be palatable theatre.

Performativity and Artaud

After witnessing a troupe of Balinese dancers, Antonin Artaud wrote of “the feeling of a new bodily language no longer based on words but on signs which emerge through the maze of gestures, postures, [and] airborne cries...” (Savarese 51). Strangely, I felt the same wonder as I was writing *The Write-In*, invited to identify the tremulous subtexts beneath the common and uncommon languages of the people of Davy. A ten-page version of the first scene originated long before the main plot of the script, and in deciding to expand what was barely short play, I had to examine and identify the iterated, discrete rules—the signs—of Davy, North Carolina.

I knew it was set in a small town, and having spent my summers and early college years in a similar small town in Appalachia, I felt I could feel out some of the dialect I wanted to use. I knew the story had something vaguely to do with religion and the signs and violent iconography of world and local religions, though I wasn't sure which. Finally, I knew, above all else, that Marcy needed to meet Jesus.

In its present form, a draft nearing the fortieth iteration, the play has begun to resemble the dance I hope it will. Like the dancers Artaud witnessed, however, the play is and has continued to be dynamic in its development, from the first read-through of Act 1 in our living room to my wife and I trading lines acting in what Victor Turner calls *liminal communitas*, or shared ritualized experiences in and out of time, together (Bial 90).

The Write-In is part memoir, and part struggle for meaning, and an all-around in-process inspection of what it means to perform “faithful” white¹ American scripts. The most traceable roots for the play originate in confused childhood memories of my mother’s struggle for recognition as a stay-at-home mom, and, beyond that, the heavy patriarchal hand of a hyper-religious household that continually pointed to her designated lines, her assigned place raising me and my siblings.

Despite some memories darker than others, joy punctuated my own childhood at church, and I felt it necessary to emulate that in this writing—the same rhythms of all-is-well laughter, blissful hypocrisy, against an underlying dread of the “capital G” god and his Old Testament wrath. The structural pillars on which many radical fundamentalist Protestants built their political empire—an anti-gay, woman-as-subservient “family

¹ There is no mention of race in *The Write-In*, and I feel it’s one of the play’s serious shortcomings. I’ve spent much time trying to figure out how to work in a narrative that encompasses my feelings about racism within the white church and electoral system, but, as this play already takes large steps over social convention, I wondered if incorporating the ideas of the church/state-as-racist might be too much. I honestly don’t know, nor do I know if I feel qualified to expand a play that already feels like it sprawls into minefields around the city limits of the white bourgeoisie theatre-goer. Perhaps I don’t give my audience enough credit, or maybe it’s cowardice, but I don’t know that I could handle more complicated American reflections.

values” platform—is a strange backdrop for mirth, but this was my childhood, and it informs me for better and worse.

Emma Gatland writes of this in her book, *Women from the Golden Legend*, in which she discusses the relationship in ritual between human and divine, writing that “ritual resides between...[them] and that it cannot be separated, therefore, from either” (98). I wondered, in writing this play, how much undue credit we yield to our divine counterparts. What if the Jesus I worshipped as a devotee was a jerk? *The Write-In* is an unpleasant play full of murder and violence, but it’s a satire for asking such a question of the predominant religion in the western world. Yet even in writing this, I wonder if I’ve done Marcy a grave disservice. She seldom speaks as many of the characters do, and most of her comic lines stem from ignorance. We laugh at her expense, watch her steal from Terrence, question his moral compass, and then ultimately blow her brains out.

I wonder too, if this isn’t due to Marcy’s performance of gender. *The Write-In* exists in a world where sex and gender are, as Judith Butler suggests, “the violent product of iterated discursive formations that sequester as unnatural and ‘unreal’ sexual and gender minorities in their considerable variation,” and Marcy, Marilyn, and Betty’s devotion to mainstream performances troubles me as a writer, especially given Marcy’s final appearance as a vegetable god (Miller 138). Do I know nothing else? And is that the logical terminus for a woman performing the roles she does? Only Gina, identified “millennial” through her screamo music and cell phone, seems well adjusted.

For this, I think the play is ultimately hopeful. We see hope for the church under a newly freed Meredith, and in the spoken gospel of a silent god, hope for Roy who freely expresses emotive love, and especially hope for Gina, who seeks to make sense and

meaning of her life's play in the same way as I do, acknowledging and nodding to the scripts at work in the lives of human actors. In this afterword, I hope to detail those scripts on which the characters operate, and perhaps, too, over which they triumph.

Foucault & Masculinity

In writing a play about a deacon and his congregant, or an election official and her boss, there must be recognition of the tensile “agonism between power relations” and “permanent political task” of power relationships (Foucault 220). Foucault tells us that power is not a “confrontation between two adversaries” and more a “question of government,” which seems an apt if not fertile ground for *The Write-In* (220). The changing statuses of the characters in the show showcase their operation within Foucault's power world, from Marcy's troubled inheritance of godhood to Terrence's outright indifference. Further, in *Truth and Power*, Foucault writes,

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (20-26)

Marcy and Ed both benefit from the political and social structures in which they “thrive,” make money, have children, houses, and religious experiences, but equally, those electoral structures that empower Ed in the role of “white man,” seek to disempower him in the role of “city councilor up for re-election.” Waving the standard of bureaucracy and electoral guidelines, Marcy is able to check Ed's hunger for sustained power (and employment). He is, in a word, “a smaller dog” than the absent election commissioner.

Ed's tactics, from threats to physical violence, push Marcy to ultimately kill him using the only tool she has in her arsenal, an election stamper—an “empowered” tool of the state.

Those half nods to the inseparable American religio-political machine are slippery mini-morals, given the overarching commentary on the interplay within structural power systems, *and* the tools of misogyny that Ed uses to minimize Marcy's concerns.

Ascribing to the *Macho Man* model, Ed abides by a heteronormative social scripting built on the premise of “violence as manly” and further, invests in his own role as dominator, both in political exploits and his role of church deacon (Mosher 61). In addition to this, Ed's idea of divine entitlement, as a deacon representative of the church, and therefore God (*The Man*), compounds his macho-ness with notions of divine entitlement.

Reading Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, one might stumble across a line in part five, in which he writes, “one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power... [is] the power to decide life and death,” likely a derivation of the *patria potestas*—the right of a family head to arbitrate the lives of his children and servants (135). While Ed does not determine the life or death of some of his congregants, he *did* confirm Marcy's daughter, acting on behalf of God as a network and gateway to salvation.

Ed's paternal role in their relationship brings with it this consistent threat of power and violence to Marcy, and unlike the docile bodies of Foucault's early theorization on which his governmental power acts with little to no “explicit agency” to resist, as Monique Deveaux suggests, Marcy strikes Ed with the full force of his own making, and it kills him (228).

By the end of scene one, Marcy has murdered both her supervisor and the head of the Christian Church—God. Who is the Roman father to decide *patria potestas* now? These few passages brought to mind a rather piquant context for the play, a much more interesting *dramatic question* than “Who won the election?” This new question that would inevitably allow me to unpack, and continue to unpack Scene 1, was simply, “What would happen if the head of the patriarchy is a man, or more specifically, a god, and he dies?”

Brecht

I feel this play would be nearly impossible without a quick nod to Bertold Brecht. His use of aesthetic distance, termed *verfremdungseffekt*, wherein an outrageous newly introduced premise or use of humor breaks the narrative to lend the audience some thinking distance, is used heavily, though I cringe with comparisons to Brechtian plays (Ristau). Still, how can one begin a conversation about religion and politics, if not with a little joke?

The Cast

Marcy

Marcy is based on an aggregate of kind but stern women I knew by growing up in a Southern Presbyterian church. The church is Marcy’s home, and by association, that of her family. Her first line, “Oh Lord Jesus, please give me guidance, please give me faith” is a common enough invocation, but the audience, if American, will likely be familiar with the sentiment. When Marcy follows her prayerful plea with a worry about “the Muslim menace” and liberals, we begin to suspect that this is a person who “tows the party line.” In the space of 2019, Marcy is meant to represent the character of a

Facebook-informed Evangelical Christian radical of the American South, as equal servant and slave (in a Foucaultian sense) to the narratives of gender and femininity produced by the structures in which she lives and operates.

Marcy is first introduced to the audience in a dynamic tension with councilman Ed Hopps, in which she surrenders and claims territory proportionately. As Judith Butler writes in *Gender Problems*, “juridical notions of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent... and the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its constitution” (2). Feeling Muslims are a threat to the “freedom” the church politic offers her and her family, Marcy parrots a narrative running counter to her interests as a co-marginalized subject, and yet propels her further ahead in the discursive ladder.

Marcy is/has fashioned/performed herself into a construction both nearly empowered in her role as an election official with sufficient public trust in her role as ballot-counter, and disempowered/subordinated by Ed the corrupt politician, whom she calls first in lieu of the election commissioner. This complicated web of power dynamics, in which Ed and Marcy each participate in a figurative muscle flexing of control—violence results, suggesting the terminus or logical conclusion of Foucault’s power model is death.

It’s this first scene of *The Write-In*, in which Marcy and Ed’s tête-à-tête finds and relieves tension, that is really the cotyledon of the show. Unpacking itself from there, I ask the audience and reader to consider what might happen when a Davy County woman accidentally upends the source of the discursive stream that prescribes her the role of mother, congregant, and election official. This is, of course, a tremendously problematic

supposition—that the surrender of power implicit in Marcy’s role, in her gender act “*continually realized*,” as Butler asserts, might change when she kills the patriarchal head of her religion (qtd. in Bial 189). In fact, its impossibility seems certain until the final moments of the play when we wonder if Gina wasn’t the protagonist after all, watching her mother struggle with the idea of Jesus’s limitless male power, and ask, well what or whom was this for?

I’m still working out Marcy’s role in this play. I like that she’s not entirely likeable, but want the audience to see what Brecht described as not approaching one another, but moving apart in an attempt to understand (Bial 219). It’s this action of aesthetic distance that Marcy truly exemplifies. Though she is parodied at the top of the show, her continued questioning of “What’s happening?” and “Why?” drives the action of Act I. As Brecht describes an actress who, playing Jocasta’s servant, emotionlessly notates her mistress’ death, saying “dead, dead,” he demonstrates the divorce of emotion from fact, allowing the audience to reinterpret underlying associations to rote response (221). The audience, at this point, may very well be frustrated that Marcy, echoing their own questions, is not given an answer, but often ignored. In this a distance is created and consideration forced.

I attempt to do this same thing in Ed’s death. By bookending Marcy’s killing spree with humor—on one side “Jesus can’t balance the transportation budget,” and the other “Oh Ed, I bonked you”—the audience is forced to consider what exactly it is they’re watching. Marcy further becomes an audience advocate on stage, who both interprets the outrageous actions of her cosmic sisters, and must make sense of the new world in which she lives, having killed god.

Toward this answer, Marcy must overcome her own scripting as election official, mother, and wife and become something greater. The idea of a female-centric religion to replace the patriarchal trinity is tricky terrain, given Marcy's difficulty speaking against authority figures, be they male or female. Marcy has no problem communicating with Terrence, a young man whose publicized mental illness places him on a lower social rung than she, but the jagged character arc of the play's protagonist is not quite a hero's journey.

Only when she meets Jesusy Paul, a perhaps long-awaited encounter given his predilection of resurrecting, is Marcy given a choice of the hero's script. She can either change into something more than Marcy by acknowledging the cosmic power she's been granted, or fall back in line under the familiar, subservient role of religious devotee. In a way, Marcy versus Jesus mirrors the conflict in Scene 1, but with a different outcome. By rising above the power structure of the patriarchy in her heart, Marcy finds a realization of her own godhood, though she becomes a god only for herself.

If she is god, if divinity is imbibed, rather than deferred, *The Write-In* becomes an exploration of how not to perform. In this reality, Marcy sits in a wheelchair wrapped in bandages, speaking incomprehensible words. As J.L. Austin has suggested that speech is performative in nature, that to "say something we are doing something," Marcy, unlike Ananias and Sapphira in Pastor Meredith's Act I sermon, is paradoxically finding authenticity in the meaninglessness of her unattributed murmurings (qtd. in Bial 177). The concept of religion as a performative act is truly underscored here. Marcy's words as nascent god may be incomprehensible, but are interpreted *anyway* by Pastor Meredith

and a church desperately seeking authenticity through yet another god. They have yet to find what she has, a self, divested of all script, therefore all-powerful.

Ed

Ed was written to represent everything any audience could hate—entitlement, corruption, and unctuousness. We know Ed the moment we see him. He is representative of the macho man patriarchy, simply. I wrote Ed as a man who exemplifies Tomkind and Mosher’s three *Macho Man* tenets, believing himself “entitled to sex,” seeing “violence as manly,” and finding “danger exciting” (Mosher & Tomkins 60, 61). The first hints of this are suggested in Marcy’s disclosure that Ed has had an illicit affair with a young college girl at Appalachian State. While Ed does not represent the belief of “violence as manly” per se, we’re led to believe he might in his overt threats and attempts to dominate Marcy on bases of religious hierarchy, personal debts, and finally an assertion of himself as the arbiter or truth.

Edward Gondolf further describes Ed’s script of a Male Personality Script in his work on the patriarchal psychology of power needs, writing that the abusive patriarch is one who thrives on “keeping another person from asserting or attaining equivalent power” (277). Undoubtedly knowing his religious history, Ed as patriarchal deacon of Marcy’s church, cohabits his title of city councilor with that of high priest. It may be construed as brutally ironic, that on his death, the “real” high priest of the Christian faith appears, only to be similarly dispatched.

Even in death, Ed haunts Marcy—like a Japanese Oni.² Connected to her

² A Japanese spirit suggested to surreptitiously haunt an offender of a previous wrong

through the brutality of his death, Ed becomes a true representation of violence, a paper bag obscuring his broken features. Like the desert of Jesus' forty-day wandering, Ed represents a passage of tribulation through which Marcy must traverse. Even in his death, Ed has become a fearful ghoul, haunting Marcy as both a traumatic memory, and reminder of her inability to escape a discursive stream of Foucaultian patriarchal influence.

Gina and Terrence

I've often wondered why Gina figures such a small role in the shape of this story, and further, why all attempts to add "more Gina" into the dialogue have felt so uneven. Because there must be a character to inherit the gruesome fate of her mother/sacrificial god, or benefit from Marcy's sacrifice, Gina's role projects from the narrative and conclusion, receiving Marcy's call to "count every one," and continue her work of checking power. Gina belongs to Generation Z, a generation I feel specially tooled to subvert the social scripts of my own millennialism, and those prior. As the inheritor of the heteronormative, radicalized, misogynist world in which Marcy lives and operates, and too as "witness" to the performative theatre of her parents, Gina finds a dual role as bearer of her family's worldview, and escapee—she's off to college.

In Act II, we are given the suggestion that Act I was/is an act of interpretation fashioned in and through Gina's absence. She has written these "true" events of her life into a play to make sense of them in yet another Brechtian push from the immediacy of the first scene. The sexism of "Man," a creative writing professor at Stanford who attempts to dominate Gina's search for meaning and structure in her story, suggests that it may be impossible to completely divorce our understanding of Gina's story from an

impartial lens. The Man's infatuation with Marilyn Monroe, the goddess of sex, further impresses this reading. He does not see Marcy in his classroom, nor the all-mother, Betty Crocker.

Terrence, the other Gen-Z character in the play, finds an even more curious niche to occupy. Minimalized by Miss Sharon for his mental illness, his role as witness in the play is marginal, though vital in providing a control as a character whose mental illness in the Davy community deprives him of any class advantage. He is the first to witness Marilyn Monroe and perhaps the first, beyond Marcy, given the opportunity to frame the sea-change taking place when she supernaturally crosses into his reality. Instead, he shrugs and jams out.

The audience is meant to like him, and to find in him a strange intersectionality between empowerment and disempowerment, suggesting that discursive power is troublesome to chart. Terrence's interactions with Marilyn are equally complex, as his sexuality, addressed by the goddess of sex, is never fleshed out. Instead, he sings Katy Perry music, which means—well, I have no idea, but isn't the idea of singing Katy Perry music to the heart's content a kind of heaven for someone?

Marilyn and Betty

Marilyn and Betty are two operators in a new trinity of which Marcy is a part. I researched both of them extensively, and am still hazy on their roles in the play. Where Marilyn is representative of the "Holy Spirit" of the Christian faith—or, in her case, passion/sex—Betty is the Mother, taking a role opposite the "Father" of the trinitary model.

Betty, a conglomerate of all mothers, suffers from the same traumatic histories of American mothers, and her pill addiction is an implicit nod to the introduction of tranquilizers during the 1950s to help quell the anxieties of women who were forced to abandon their jobs and assume the role of housewife for returning troops (Coontz 37). Marilyn finds similar trauma in her associations with men, both Jesus and her ex-husband, Arthur Miller. Both Marilyn and Betty are entrenched in the trauma-bearing role of their “gendered” lives, one as an objectified sex symbol, and the other as the “restless” housewife (Coontz 36).

Closing

The Write-In and this afterword have simultaneously been a compelling lesson in “I don’t know,” and the closest my work has ever been to working through personal injuries in play format. There’s much more to be said about what Marcy means, or what Gina might do, and I fully admit I don’t quite understand it all yet, nor can I separate myself from my obvious prejudices. What I can say, though, is that the play and the thoughts behind it are representative of my work at Radford University and a nascent understanding of how people perform. Killing God is not an easy role to take, but I am glad Marcy did.

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