

# Amusing Ourselves To Death

by

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

A man arrested for painting "hope" in large letters across a street is at the center of a story about betrayal, revenge, and love.

## CHARACTERS

- PETER WALDO -- 50s, has been an insurance salesman forever
- ISAIAH -- late 20s/early 30s
- SARAH -- 50s, PETER's assistant and perhaps more
- CHIEF HANNAH BARTLETT -- 65, going on retirement
- HELIOS
- KATHERINE

Inspired by John Gardner's *The Sunlight Dialogues*.

## Scene 1

Isaiah stands in the woods.

On the ground is a well-stuffed well-worn rucksack with a tent and a sleeping bag attached.

He kneels down in front of a flat rock. On the rock is a cell phone. In Isaiah's hand is a small hammer.

He breaks the cellphone, then carefully picks up the pieces and puts them in a burlap bag.

Next, he puts a laptop on the stump and smashes that. Puts the pieces in the bag. Perhaps even a tablet. Those pieces go in as well.

He shakes the bag, then stands and swings the bag over his head like a dead cat by the tail and lets out a wild whoop -- several, in fact, that echo through the woods. They could be wails of mourning.

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**Scene 2**

The office of Peter Waldo, insurance salesman. Sarah, his assistant, sits on the other side of his desk, appointment book in hand.

SARAH

You did hear what I said.

PETER

No. Yes. I did.

SARAH

Glad the memory's still working.

SARAH

So really?

SARAH

Yes really --

PETER

Hmm --

SARAH

There's someone on your land.

PETER

By the pond?

SARAH

Those heavenly eleven acres.

PETER

Who?

SARAH

Walt.

PETER

Walt. Walt would be in a position to know.

SARAH

Park rangers have a way of knowing.

PETER

Did Walt say anything? Do anything?

SARAH

About "say" -- nothing but tell me. About "do" -  
- it's not his job.

PETER  
True -- Walt's job is to tell you, yes. About  
Walt --

SARAH  
Auto's coming up -- and his boat --

PETER  
Thought so --

SARAH  
You don't seem worried.

PETER  
About Walt? He always pays on time.

SARAH  
Come on.

PETER  
Should I be? I don't if I should be. So why be  
worried about what I don't know.

SARAH  
That's not a good attitude for an insurance  
salesman --

PETER  
True.

SARAH  
-- and I'd like to keep my job.

PETER  
Though insurance agent of the year, four years  
running.

SARAH  
And year five --

PETER  
Year five -- is -- will be -- year five. Not to  
worry about what you don't know -- not too bad  
for life in general, don't you think. At least  
most days.

SARAH  
Everything all right?

PETER  
Yeah.

SARAH  
Because you're sounding grumpy like the bar guys  
down at the VFW.

PETER

Nobody can match them, Sarah. No, I feel right as rain, though I have no idea what that saying is supposed to mean.

SARAH

If you're a thirsty plant --

PETER

The lament of the dry riverbed. Is the billing done?

SARAH

Going out today, just as it has always gone out at the time it is supposed to go out. Are you sure?

PETER

I think so.

SARAH

You going to check him out?

PETER

I suppose I should. Did Walt say who he was? Is?

SARAH

Walt didn't get that close, just saw someone from the access road. It's your land. You've got building plans for it.

PETER

What's a day without having your plans?

SARAH

Grump. I think you should go back to eating yogurt -- you had a glow then.

PETER

Just an expensive glass of milk.

SARAH

Just a suggestion. You've got the meeting with the Rotary today and then the Willetts for their new boat.

PETER

Bundle it with the auto, save them a bundle.

SARAH

Let the slogans begin.

PETER

Have never failed us yet.

SARAH

Oh, and by the way --

PETER

What? And why the smirk?

SARAH

Charles Brixton.

PETER

What?

SARAH

So you haven't heard.

PETER

No.

SARAH

I just got news they found Charles Brixton passed away. You know, got it through my telephone grapevine.

PETER

Charles Brixton?

SARAH

Sitting in his bathrobe at his desk in his mansion on his hill overlooking his town --

PETER

Don't speak ill --

SARAH

Oh, I was done speaking ill of Charles Brixton long time ago -- only so many curse words in the dictionary you can apply to a man like him, a family like that, and I just ran out.

PETER

I can understand, Sarah.

SARAH

You should --

PETER

Your father should've gotten treated better --

SARAH

What Charles Brixton tried to do to my father was shrimpcakes compared to you --

PETER

But it didn't work, did it, either way -- your father got out from under, and so did I, and here I am -- here we are -- bundling things together to make people's lives better.

SARAH

If I didn't know you better, I would've sworn that was sarcasm.

PETER

Just skimming along the edge.

SARAH

Have to say that my grapevine is a lot better than the Internet -- better quality outrage --

Sarah leaves. Peter muses. He reaches into his desk, pulls out what looks like a well-thumbed Bible, opens it, reads.

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### Scene 3

Peter, wearing a classic alpaca coat, tromps across his land and finds Isaiah seated in front of his tent on a camp stool, roll-up variety. Isaiah is writing in a small journal.

The burlap bag is on the ground beside him.

PETER

I own this land, you know.

ISAIAH

You kicking me off?

PETER

I'm just stating the fact for the record, that's all. What're you doing on it?

ISAIAH

What are you doing owning it? What does that mean, for the record?

PETER

Do you know who I am?

ISAIAH

Will that make a difference? He's deciding.

PETER

You must have your reasons. Do I know you?

ISAIAH

Does anyone know anyone?

PETER

You are full of questions, but not the ones I'm asking you --

ISAIAH

It's what I'm giving you back.

PETER

So you don't answer what I ask -- life is still good. Just that if I did know you, I don't recognize you, and so I'm sorry for that. Do you have another one of those stools? These are not shoes made for the woods.

ISAIAH

Should've prepared better.

PETER

Yea, verily, for all times. Do you?

Isaiah reaches into the tent and pulls out another camp stool. He goes to unroll it, but Peter indicates that he doesn't have to do that, and so opens it himself and sits.

PETER

These are pretty nifty. You brought two -- interesting.

Peter unlaces his shoes, loosens them. They muse.

Isaiah reaches down, grabs the burlap bag, and tosses it over to Peter, where it lands with a thump and a rattle.

ISAIAH

Act of contrition. Mine.

Peter looks in the bag, nods in appreciation, closes it, sets it on the ground beside him.

PETER

Right as rain. Do you know what "right as rain" means? Today I said, to a dear friend of mine, that I was right as rain. I don't believe I am. Right, that is. As rain. Walt, the park ranger, was the one who told me about you. The park borders all the lake over there, except for this parcel.

ISAIAH

So your "parcel" kept the whole thing from being a park for everyone.

PETER

You could put it that way. I keep it open -- obviously -- contiguous. Post for no hunting but not for trespassing.

ISAIAH

To you that sounds like doing enough.

PETER

It's worked so far.

ISAIAH

So what does my being here make me?

PETER

Who knows what enough is, what is enough. Right as rain -- maybe that's what you are. Nice to be out here -- I don't get out here enough.

ISAIAH

One thing that makes me is an excuse.

Peter picks up the burlap bag, shakes it.

PETER

Why are you so angry?

ISAIAH

Why aren't you?

PETER

You can't know if I am or not, but -- you are, so your question to me is just, what, grumpiness -- like the bar guys down at the VFW.

ISAIAH

I'm nothing like those leftovers.

PETER

You know them?

ISAIAH

Know of them.

PETER

So why are you deflecting my question with a question -- a verbal en garde of yours, it seems.

ISAIAH

All right, then this: why shouldn't I be angry?

PETER

I heard once that it means you're paying attention -- actually, more than once. Is that true? Is that what you're doing -- trying to do? Pay attention? By now Walt the park ranger has told Chief of Police Hannah Bartlett -- we're progressive, a woman -- tough woman -- tough -- he's told her that you're out here and that I know you're out here. It's not a static situation -- things are in motion, no matter how much you cram into the burlap bag.

ISAIAH

I'm going to bury that bag.

PETER

Doesn't make a difference. Change is afoot, change is abroad. Even out here. Speaking of feet -- time to herd them back in.

Peter re-ties his shoes, checks his watch, stands.

PETER

I have my rounds to keep.

ISAIAH

Are. You. Kicking. Me. Off.

Peter picks up the stool, re-folds it.

PETER

You have your reasons. You have appeared.

Peter offers Isaiah the stool. Isaiah takes it.

PETER

I'll talk to Walt. I'll talk to Chief Bartlett. Don't burn the place down. You'll probably get a visit from the chief -- don't underestimate her, the way you generally seem to be doing with this entire current situation.

Peter turns to go, walks a bit, turns back.

PETER

We should exchange names, now that you're my temporary tenant. You don't have to, but I'll find it out anyway -- Walt, Chief Bartlett, they like to know these things and so, in the due course of time, they will come to find out --

ISAIAH

Isaiah.

PETER

That your given name or one assumed -- I am referring to the burlap bag.

ISAIAH

It's a given name.

PETER

Clever answer. Just don't be clever with Walt or the Chief -- I'm not such a libertarian that I won't stop them from coming on here to take you off if they think it the thing to do.

ISAIAH

Is the shoreline yours?

PETER

And fifty feet into the lake.

ISAIAH

I'm thinking of hygiene.

PETER

Pit privy would be recommended. You have tools?

ISAIAH

I have the means.

PETER

I'll trust you're telling me the truth.

Peter turns and leaves.

PETER

Anger. Careful. Bury it deep. Glad you've got a second stool. Shows hope.

Peter leaves. Isaiah shouts after him.

ISAIAH

Bottom of the privy -- that deep enough for you?

No response. Quiet woods. Isaiah puts the second stool inside the tent, picks up the burlap bag, sets it down by his stool. He gives it a good stomp with his heel, then sits down, picks up the journal, writes.

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#### Scene 4

At the Rotary lunch. Lunch sounds, garbled voice of a boring speaker. Hannah picks up the cutlery.

BARTLETT

You sure?

PETER

I sell insurance, Hannah -- I'm not in the "sure" business.

BARTLETT

Don't be smart.

PETER

Are you in the "sure" business?

BARTLETT

Serve and protect.

PETER

You're being professionally worried for no good reason.

BARTLETT

I can run him off for trespassing.

PETER

It's not posted for that.

BARTLETT

Doesn't have to be posted -- you know [that] --

PETER

Is that what he's doing?

BARTLETT

Technically.

PETER

Letter of the law --

BARTLETT

That's it.

PETER

-- but, really, Hannah, what does that mean, "technically"?

BARTLETT

Something in your chicken that I didn't get?

PETER

Same rubber protein --

BARTLETT

Different kind of rubber in your chicken, then? Because you're not making --

PETER

I am just saying that he doesn't seem to be a threat to public safety.

BARTLETT

Until your woods go up, along with the state park, and then the new developments along the county road. Should I continue to enumerate?

PETER

I don't have a good comeback.

BARTLETT

Let me at least show my face to him.

PETER

I told him you might do that -- so you should go ahead and do that.

Peter makes a sign of the cross.

PETER

I give you my blessing.

BARTLETT

I don't need your blessing.

PETER

I give it to you anyway, free of charge.

BARTLETT

Keep it for someone who wants it. Did he give you a last name?

PETER

Why so grumpy, Hannah?

BARTLETT

Did he give you a last name?

PETER

No, he did not. I don't know if the name he gave is a first name or a last, or even his. Why so grumpy? You're like the guys at the VFW.

BARTLETT

I can't speak about it.

PETER

Even though everyone knows about it -- c'mon -- have gossip, will travel.

BARTLETT

So. You heard about Charles Brixton?

PETER

From Sarah and her grapevine.

BARTLETT

Sent Figaro up there this morning to check it out -- seems like a pure heart failure, no foul play. But King Charles Brixton dies just when -- I can't speak about it.

PETER

Hannah --

BARTLETT

It's just -- "creepy" is the only word -- Brixton kicks off and we get a man who paints the word "hope" in big swooshy letters across the steps of the county courthouse, we take him in, he calls himself "Helios" -- out of a book, he says -- you know what "Helios" means?

PETER

I do.

BARTLETT

I didn't, not until I --

PETER

So he forced to use your computer --

BARTLETT

It's not funny.

PETER

You and computers --

BARTLETT

You don't seem to particularly care about the law today, either.

PETER

Sorry -- I can see -- sorry. Maybe it is the chicken. Is the painting all he's done?

BARTLETT

All that we know about.

PETER

I don't what book he's referring to.

BARTLETT

I don't care about the book -- I don't even care about the painting, though it's defacing public property -- the county courthouse, for God's sake, so there's the sheriff to have to --

PETER

What is it, Hannah?

BARTLETT

What I care about is this feeling I have that --  
well --

PETER

Well?

BARTLETT

Shouldn't be talking about this.

PETER

Then let's not talk about it here. We can go --  
the desserts are rolling out, and that's usually  
like the starting bell for the races.

They get up and move off to the side. Peter pulls a snuff box out of his pocket and dollops a little into the palm of his hand. He hands Hannah the box -- she also puts some into her palm and hands back the box.

Together, they snuff their tobacco. They do not sneeze -- they are not beginners at this.

BARTLETT

At least they haven't made that illegal yet.

PETER

Be a shame to have to turn in my grandfather's  
snuff box.

BARTLETT

So --

PETER

So, Chief --

BARTLETT

So. I'm retiring soon, you know that, and I  
don't want to have these kinds of feelings in my  
gut -- I want it smooth, I want to exit with a  
minimum of -- perturbation -- how's that for a  
word, eh?

PETER

Helios --

BARTLETT

He makes me feel like there are creatures in the  
earth coming out that shouldn't be seeing the  
light of day. And then Brixton turns up dead --

PETER

He didn't "turn up dead," Hannah -- he just died like an old man does.

BARTLETT

You must feel some good about that.

PETER

Mixed, to be honest.

BARTLETT

I, for one, am glad to see his line end, but with him and this Helios and the cemetery vandalism, the dead baby in the chimney flue, two murders -- two, Peter, since when have we ever had two --

PETER

Helios can't be responsible for --

BARTLETT

I'm not saying he is. But these are signs.

PETER

Maybe retirement has you spooked --

BARTLETT

A rash of trouble, like the fabric is coming apart. End-times, you know -- seismic changes -- who cares enough about "hope" these days to paint it and then be arrested for it and then --

PETER

That was a pretty sharp shut of your trap, Hannah -- what did you almost let out?

BARTLETT

You heard about his face?

PETER

No.

BARTLETT

Part-covered in scar tissue, like he'd been through fire. And he knows things. About us. About the city. About Brixton. About me.

PETER

Things.

BARTLETT

Things that would be known only by someone who would know them to tell them. He's a sign, Peter, he's a sign.

PETER

And don't forget we also got a guy named Isaiah wandering the woods -- and smashing up the symbols of modern civilization.

BARTLETT

Hadn't thought of that -- in that way.

PETER

Hannah, it's just an observation --

BARTLETT

But everything is connected.

PETER

Doesn't mean they're connected to each other --

BARTLETT

What else is law enforcement -- what else is my job -- except believing that -- effect and cause and figuring out who pays.

PETER

Sometimes --

BARTLETT

Peter?

PETER

Sorry -- might sound profound but really just silly.

BARTLETT

Your grandfather wouldn't have stopped himself.

PETER

A civil tongue was not the minister's strong suit. It's my bread-and-butter. Let it go. I've got to get out to the Willetts.

BARTLETT

Glad we missed the dessert.

PETER

Given your stomach.

BARTLETT

One other thing about this Helios --

PETER

Walk me to my car.

BARTLETT

He's a magician -- good -- he picked Kashinsky's pocket while handcuffed and Kashinsky was marching him to the holding cell --

PETER

That's not magic.

BARTLETT

No, you're right -- feels more like apocalypse.

And off they go.

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### Scene 5

Hannah at Isaiah's campsite. Burlap bag is still in view. Isaiah is seated on one of the stools, whittling.

Bartlett, hands on hips, watches. Exasperated.

BARTLETT

Okay -- okay okay okay. Again -- why?

ISAIAH

You sure? Sit down?

BARTLETT

No.

ISAIAH

You'd like "why."

BARTLETT

A formality.

ISAIAH

Uh-huh.

BARTLETT

Even though Mr. Waldo says you can stay here, truth is that you're still trespassing, which is my domain, not his.

ISAIAH

Though where we're sitting -- well, you standing -- right here -- this is his domain, right?

BARTLETT

Deed-wise, yes. We're not talking about deeds.

ISAIAH

Why. No -- not yet, at least. Theories?

BARTLETT

None --

ISAIAH

Really, you should sit down.

BARTLETT

I'm fine.

ISAIAH

It's not a short walk to your cruiser over there on the access road. That I know. Let me do you a good deed, even if this isn't about deeds.

Isaiah pulls the second camp stool from the tent and hands it to Hannah. Hannah opens it and sets it down but does not sit.

ISAIAH

At least some water.

BARTLETT

Fine. I'd like to know some facts --

ISAIAH

So would I.

BARTLETT

Stop with the mocking.

ISAIAH

Fact: pit privy is over there, more than 100 feet from the water line, as prescribed by your law --

BARTLETT

How would you know that?

ISAIAH

I read it -- at your library. The other day.

BARTLETT

You don't have the permit to dig --

ISAIAH

Mr. Waldo asked me to make sure -- so, a permit, sort of, right? His domain, deed-wise.

BARTLETT

You walked to the library.

ISAIAH

It's also where I learned more about Helios.

BARTLETT

On-going investigation.

ISAIAH

Aren't they all?

Hannah and Isaiah appraise one another.

ISAIAH

Painting "hope" -- wow.

BARTLETT

Why are you out here? Why have you appeared?

ISAIAH

Fact: I've been living off my own form of MREs, carefully collecting any waste --

BARTLETT

Your "facts" are just details --

ISAIAH

You want "fact" facts. You are a fact-based person, officer of the law. All right -- facts for you.

Isaiah picks up the burlap bag and tosses it to Hannah. Hannah looks at it like it's a snake.

ISAIAH

It won't bite. Bitten me, but that's all the bite it has. Bite is gone. It won't bite you.

Hannah moves the bag with her toe, then picks it up and looks inside.

ISAIAH

All those -- technical marvels -- not a saving grace among them.

BARTLETT

Why?

ISAIAH

Things that don't have any saving graces should be smashed.

BARTLETT

Technically, I could consider that a terrorist statement, according to --

ISAIAH

In your hands I rest our homeland security. I don't blame you -- common-sense is terrorist -- threatening to think straight can be terrorist --

Hannah puts the bag down.

ISAIAH

Still no theories?

BARTLETT

Technology is such a bastard these days.

ISAIAH

These days? What about that technology on your hip, your "side-arm" --

Isaiah clamps up, whittles.

BARTLETT

Something happen about a sidearm?

ISAIAH

That bag -- I keep it to remind me of pointlessness. I am planning to bury it, but it keeps reminding me. That's a fact for you: I have come here because of pointlessness.

BARTLETT

Here.

Isaiah laughs, but without much humor.

ISAIAH

Homeland security. On-going investigation.

Isaiah whittles. Hannah watches.

ISAIAH

Anything else? Any theories?

Hannah looks at Isaiah whittling.

BARTLETT

I'm thinking grief -- anger -- can smell something like that coming off you. Kind of like a pit privy -- even one properly built.

Isaiah tries to act indifferent, but he doesn't mask it well.

BARTLETT

Careful -- medical help'd be hard to come by out here, especially without a phone.

ISAIAH

Thank you for your words of caution.

BARTLETT

Those are the only words I've got for you. My drill -- you've got Mr. Waldo's permission, but I don't have to abide by it --

ISAIAH

Got it.

BARTLETT

Just fact. Grief -- anger -- that's my first theory.

ISAIAH

Enjoy.

Hannah hitches up her belt, gets herself ready to walk back to the access road.

BARTLETT

Grant you -- it's nice out here.

ISAIAH

Good luck with Helios.

BARTLETT

Luck has nothing to do with it.

ISAIAH

Wrong theory.

They give each other the once over. Hannah leaves.

Isaiah whittles a bit more, then stops, muses. He pulls a photo out of his shirt pocket, muses over it, looks off while toying with the photo -- as if the decision he is making and the photo he holds have something to do with each other.

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### Scene 6

Peter's office, Peter reading from his Bible. Sarah leads in Isaiah.

SARAH

Your tenant.

PETER

Make yourself comfortable. Thanks, Sarah.

ISAIAH

Thanks.

SARAH

Make sure he's got the rent check.

PETER

You keep me honest.

Sarah edges out of the office.

PETER  
She doesn't think I'm doing the right thing --

ISAIAH  
Obviously. Who --

PETER  
Sarah?

ISAIAH  
Do you like her?

PETER  
Everyone likes her.

ISAIAH  
Come on. Come on.

Peter knows what he means, but he won't play the game.

ISAIAH  
Unrequited.

PETER  
Not about Sarah.

ISAIAH  
Then about many things --

PETER  
Can't be satisfied all the time.

ISAIAH  
Life. Living.

PETER  
You could say that.

An active silence. Isaiah fidgets.

PETER  
I won't pry if you don't want me to.

ISAIAH  
I left my stuff at the tent so your police chief  
could check it out at her leisure --

PETER  
It's her job.

ISAIAH  
There are jobs, and there are jobs.

PETER  
She told me her theory.

ISAIAH

What's yours? You must have one.

PETER

That Jesus Christ meant what he said -- or at least what the four have him say. Everything after that went the wrong way.

Peter's words agitate Isaiah even more, and he gets up to pace.

PETER

Chief Bartlett thinks Helios is a sign, a sign of things to come or things that are already coming. What's your theory about that theory, since we seem to be in the mode of exchanging theories.

Sarah enters with two glasses of water. She gives one to Peter, the other to Isaiah.

SARAH

It's a long walk, even on a day like today.

ISAIAH

Thank you.

Isaiah takes a sip, then finds that he's downing the whole glass. Peter offers Isaiah his own. Isaiah takes that and drinks it down. Sarah takes the glasses.

ISAIAH

Thirstier than I thought.

SARAH

More?

Isaiah shakes his head no.

PETER

Sarah -- your opinion. Chief Bartlett thinks Helios is a sign -- of things to come or things already coming. What's your theory about that?

SARAH

More?

PETER

I'm good. You?

ISAIAH

Fine. Thank you.

PETER

You sure --

SARAH

The Chief would think of signs -- that's her job, seeing signs.

ISAIAH

-- I'm fine.

SARAH

Helios? Who knows? But you? If there's a sign, I think it's you.

ISAIAH

Of what?

SARAH

That would be for my boss to find out -- it's his land.

PETER

Come on, Sarah -- one theory, at least. Our Isaiah here thinks everyone has them -- right?

SARAH

All right, twist my rubber arm. For me, the apocalypse is always happening, just in slow motion. Takes ages, never finishes, always leaves bones behind. Like a glacier.

Sarah muses a moment, then looks ISAIAH square in the face.

SARAH

Don't know your particular secret, don't really care -- yet -- but whatever it is, it drove you to come to this longitude and latitude and not somewhere else to look for bones. I said I don't care, and I don't, but I will care if what you're digging for hurts him. Not theory. Fact. And now --

Sarah does a little curtsy and leaves.

PETER

Out of the mouth of a babe -- sorry, bad joke, not even sure why I said it.

Peter looks at Isaiah.

ISAIAH

What?

PETER

Well, a response. Some reaction.

ISAIAH

It was a mistake to come here.

PETER

That's right, you came here. You walked to this office for a reason, and so far people have cut you slack. You are a sign -- Sarah's or somebody's, I don't know -- but, really, unless there's something soon, the Chief is going to get her way, no matter what I say.

Isaiah finally speaks.

ISAIAH

I need your help. I want to speak to Helios.

PETER

So ask the Chief. I'm serious. But she'll ask you what I'm about to ask you: why? And unless you can answer that.

ISAIAH

I just need to speak with him.

PETER

And, again, why? You're getting close to having to give a "why" unless you just want to live out on my property until the Chief hauls you away, mission not accomplished.

ISAIAH

I can't say "why" until I talk with him. I just can't.

PETER

You're asking me to trust you.

ISAIAH

"Jesus Christ meant what he said."

PETER

That has no bearing on things at the moment.

ISAIAH

If it's got no bearing, what's the point of a theory about it? And telling it to me?

PETER

The Chief is going to ask me why -- no way around that. If I do this favor for you, I need something on my side going in. Something that says --

ISAIAH

Who is he to me, this strange man, this apparition.

PETER

Something like that.

ISAIAH

Change in request, then. Tell the Chief that you want me brought in for trespassing -- you know, scare me a little, scare me straight. Leave me in there, bail me out, doesn't matter -- but I guess it's time to bring in the law.

PETER

You're sure.

ISAIAH

As sure as my pit privy.

PETER

Thank you for that, by the way.

ISAIAH

I'm leaving. You will?

PETER

I'll -- consider it.

ISAIAH

She's had time to go through my stuff -- at least she'll see I'm not a terrorist -- probably disappoint her.

Isaiah leaves.

PETER

That is not what is going to disappoint her.

Peter taps his Bible. Sarah enters, papers in hand.

SARAH

You're being awfully Christian about this.

PETER

What else can you be to a sign of the apocalypse?

SARAH

Get him off your property as soon as you can.

PETER

I will.

SARAH

He's no reason to bruise your friendship with Hannah.

PETER

He knows something about this Helios -- or thinks he does.

Sarah puts the papers on Peter's desk.

SARAH

Checks, for invoices. Sign 'em. I don't care if he knows.

PETER

But I do. Checks. Okay.

SARAH

Don't forget. That's what the "babe" thinks. I heard.

Sarah gives him a big smile, and for the moment Peter's mood is lightened. Sarah kisses him on the cheek, then backs out, making fun of him with swami hand-gestures.

SARAH

Don't forget. Don't forget. Don't forget.

Sarah turns and goes. Peter moves the checks to one side, opens the Bible, reads.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 7

Helios and Isaiah are in "cells," which take up most of the stage. To one side is an observation room with a video monitor and a speaker system.

Helios is seated in a meditative position. His face is partially disfigured by scar tissue, his suit is dirtied, his hair is wild.

Isaiah watches him.

Peter and Hannah in the room with video monitor.

BARTLETT

I'm not supposed to question him directly -- sheriff wants to do that on his own. But with modern communications --

PETER

Cells are monitored.

BARTLETT

State requirement -- safety of the prisoners. Except we couldn't afford the one-way-mirror -- would've had to knock out the wall --

PETER

He's safe?

BARTLETT

Unless Helios can, well, shrink through the bars.

PETER

You do not sound certain.

BARTLETT

He says things -- does things -- knows things --

PETER

Maybe he's from here.

BARTLETT

He look like anybody ever bought a policy from you? Maybe he's a lost member of the Rotary -- or the Odd Fellows --

PETER

Just looking at the options, Hannah.

BARTLETT

The sheriff is my option, I shall not want. Good to get them both out of here. You are going to press the trespassing, right? Peter?

PETER

I'm considering it.

BARTLETT

Considering? Then why did you have me --

HELIOS

Chief Bartlett? I know you have access to us.

Peter and Hannah clam up, though they know Helios can't hear them. Hannah turns off the room light, though she knows he can't see them.

PETER

He can't see [us] --

BARTLETT

Sssh --

Hannah paces, lit by the video monitor in the room. Helios sighs.

HELIOS

The law, the thin blue line between -- well, between what and what? Each "what" must answer. Chief Bartlett, my local habitation is a big old house on Lowrey Street, where I dream alone of metaphysics.

Hannah and Peter both act startled

BARTLETT

How's he know where you live? I told you --

HELIOS

As a friend I can tell you: metaphysics can ruin a person for life.

PETER

Metaphysics --

HELIOS

I'll bet he is mouthing the word.

ISAIAH

She.

HELIOS

He. You think you know but you don't.

ISAIAH

What don't I know?

HELIOS

Where shall I begin? How about this: Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine --

Helios continues to say the prayer as Hannah and Peter converse. After Isaiah's line, Helios stops saying the words and simply mouths them while looking at Isaiah, perhaps even making the sign of the cross, but backwards, or in some other loopy fashion.

HELIOS

-- et lux perpetua luceat eis. Requiescant in pace.

ISAIAH

It is you, isn't it?

HELIOS

(mouthing the words)

-- Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion; et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem: exaudi orationem meam; ad te omnis caro veniet. Dies irae, dies illa solvet saeculum in favilla, teste David cum Sibylla. Quantus tremor est futurus, quando iudex est venturus, cuncta stricte discussurus!

BARTLETT

What's he saying?

PETER

The prayer for eternal rest --

BARTLETT

Really?

PETER

Catholic -- requiem, mass for the dead --

BARTLETT

And how would you know Latin?

PETER

Apparently, I know metaphysics, too.

BARTLETT

Doesn't answer my question. Why am I feeling like you're not on my side all of a sudden?

PETER

Hannah --

BARTLETT

I'm gonna move the kid -- and it isn't good he knows where you live --

Everyone is interrupted by a slice of Mozart's "Requiem" that fills the air -- but as if it's playing through the PA system. So short that no one can say for sure they heard it -- though they heard it.

Helios finishes the prayer.

BARTLETT

All right, that's it. That's f[ucking] -- Christ enough already -- sixty-five and --

Hannah swings out of her office into the cell area. Peter, musing, follows.

As Hannah arrives, trailed by Peter, Katherine appears, though only Helios can see her, wearing a simple flame-colored shift. She passes through the cell area like a ghost, which is what she is. She can touch Helios, but Helios cannot touch her. Isaiah watches Helios watch Katherine.

Katherine waits to the side.

BARTLETT

What's your name? What's your goddamn name?

Helios slowly pivots his gaze away from Katherine to Hannah.

BARTLETT

What were you looking at?

Helios looks at Peter.

HELIOS

I am looking at nothing. Peter Waldo was known in history as a pious man who made the mistake of believing the gospels meant what they said.

BARTLETT

What's he talking about?

PETER

Where I come from.

BARTLETT

That tells me nothing. He tells me nothing, you tell me nothing. One more time: what is your name?

HELIOS

Puddin Tane.

BARTLETT

Not in the mood for smart[ass] --

HELIOS

It's my first and second nature.

BARTLETT

You've committed a serious crime. You sensible of that?

HELIOS

The Lord is my sensible, I shall not want.

BARTLETT

Do you have a job? Do you have any means of support?

HELIOS

I am employed by the insurance policy of metaphysics.

Something about this answer strikes Hannah. She pulls the ring of keys off her gear belt and opens Isaiah's cell.

BARTLETT

Come on!

Hannah grabs Isaiah and shoves him into Peter's arms.

BARTLETT

Back out there, now! Go!

Hannah re-locks the cell door, replaces the keys. Peter guides Isaiah out of the area. Isaiah resists but not too strongly, and they end up in the observation room, video monitor still on.

Hannah paces -- at various times, she comes close enough to Helios' cell for Helios to reach out and touch if he wanted to. He will, at some point, slip the keys off her belt.

HELIOS

Why are you shaking?

Katherine settles into Isaiah's former cell. Her light makes her a madonna in flame. Helios sees her -- when they speak to each other, Hannah doesn't hear them.

BARTLETT

You're an intelligent man, obvious --

HELIOS

I am the Lord God of Hosts.

BARTLETT

Smartass intelligent --

KATHERINE

Don't harass her so.

BARTLETT

What was the Lord's purpose, writing "hope" on a courthouse?

HELIOS

The world craves more hope, sister.

(To KATHERINE)

I'm not lying.

KATHERINE

Let it go, sweet --

BARTLETT

More hope? -- more hope? --

KATHERINE

-- let it go.

BARTLETT

Is defacing public property any way to get more hope?

HELIOS

When the spirits say paint --

BARTLETT

Stop talking gibberish.

HELIOS

You ask the wrong questions, you use the wrong vocabulary.

BARTLETT

And "hope" is the right [word] --

KATHERINE

Gentle -- you know how.

HELIOS

It brought the four of us together -- no, five --  
no, six --

BARTLETT

Answer my question. Answer my --

HELIOS

I've forgotten what it was.

BARTLETT

What was your purpose --

HELIOS

Why do you keep pacing? Sit down. Relax. You  
make me nervous.

BARTLETT

I'll decide when it's time to sit down.

HELIOS

No, you won't.

BARTLETT

I won't?

HELIOS

You'll put it off until the last minute and then  
you'll fall on your sixty-five-year old  
retirement posterior, calling it "duty." Serving  
and protecting. Watchdog of society. Why do you  
tremble so? Answer my question.

BARTLETT

Where do you really live? Just answer my  
questions.

HELIOS

How should I answer that?

KATHERINE

It's been your question for years.

BARTLETT

What happened to your face?

HELIOS

What happened to yours?

KATHERINE

So much pain.

Katherine gets up to go.

HELIOS

No!

BARTLETT

No?

HELIOS

Requiescat in pace.

KATHERINE

Never, sweet -- none of us.

Katherine leaves.

BARTLETT

What? Who should --

HELIOS

I want to talk with the prophet.

BARTLETT

No.

Hannah backs out of the cell area.

BARTLETT

No. No.

Hannah moves back to the room.

Helios waits -- then Hannah's keys appear in his hands. He unlocks the cell door, steps out, drops the keys on the floor, and exits just as Hannah comes to the observation room.

Peter and Isaiah have seen what Helios did. Hannah looks at the monitor, sees that Helios is gone, feels the empty gear belt, bolts out of the room.

Hannah sees the keys on the floor, just stares at them.

BARTLETT

Punked -- punked --

Hannah looks up where the video camera would be; Isaiah and Peter stare at Hannah in the monitor.

Then Hannah picks up the keys and barrels out of the room to see if anyone in the station saw the ghost leave.

Peter and Isaiah come into the cell area.

PETER

You know who he is.

ISAIAH

No.

PETER

I heard you ask him. I don't think Chief Bartlett heard you.

ISAIAH

I said no.

PETER

Your face says different.

ISAIAH

So don't look at my face.

PETER

It's filling up the room -- hard to miss. We should leave.

ISAIAH

Where am I going to go?

Hannah walks back in -- her face shows that no one in the station saw Helios leave. The three look at each other.

BARTLETT

I'm thinking I should lock you both up.

PETER

I'm sorry, Hannah.

BARTLETT

You're not going to press him, are you?

Peter doesn't answer. Hannah is barely holding in her rage.

BARTLETT

You realize what this means for me? Both of you -- do you realize? Pension, my service record --

Hannah bites her tongue.

BARTLETT

You. Both. Should. Go.

Hannah gives Isaiah a direct look.

BARTLETT

The only reason I'm not arresting you is because I don't want you anywhere near me, near this place -- I want you away and gone -- off his land, out of this city --

Hannah swivels her gaze to Peter.

BARTLETT

And you -- you -- I don't think we're doing another Rotary lunch together. Trust, eh? Trust. Go.

Isaiah leaves. Peter lingers.

BARTLETT

It'd better be for a good reason, Peter.

Peter leaves. Hannah stares.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 8

Peter in his office. He has papers spread out, files open, a box of files on the floor with the top off. He's doing research.

Sarah pops her head in. Peter, startled, turns, sees who it is, sighs in relief.

SARAH

What are you doing?

PETER

What are you doing?

SARAH

I saw the light on -- I was bringing mom home --

PETER

Ah, right, the once-a-week.

SARAH

Surf and turf at the Coach -- never varies.

PETER

Comfort in that.

SARAH

For some -- for her. So, what --

PETER

Charles Brixton --

SARAH  
We didn't do his insurances, ever.

PETER  
No we didn't. Come in --

SARAH  
So what's up?

PETER  
Just that your mention of him -- brought  
something back --

SARAH  
With that look on your face -- I should get the  
scotch.

PETER  
Might be a good idea.

Sarah pulls out the office scotch and two tumblers and pours it, neat.  
She hands him one, takes the other. They sip together.

SARAH  
I think you're going to have to start this one  
off.

PETER  
Yes.

SARAH  
So?

PETER  
What do you recall about the Brixton family?

SARAH  
A large brood up on the hill. "A large brood of  
vipers" is, I believe, the standard way of --

PETER  
Not all of them.

SARAH  
Maybe. The youngest -- the end of the line --  
Kate --

PETER  
Katherine --

SARAH  
She seemed nice -- she came off the hill, among  
us commoners --

PETER

Sarah --

SARAH

Can't help myself.

PETER

About Katherine -- what -- what else?

Sarah sips for a moment, then a wave of memory comes across her face.

SARAH

Oh --

PETER

Right.

SARAH

You're thinking about --

PETER

Yeah --

SARAH

Peter, that fire has to be -- twenty years ago --

PETER

Twenty years it is.

They sip as they remember.

SARAH

I do remember that fire --

PETER

The twins' graves are in the Methodist cemetery.  
Still.

SARAH

That is the nature of graves. Her husband --

PETER

Go on. Go on.

Sarah laughs, raises her glass.

SARAH

You're baiting me.

PETER

I know how you like to get out your pitchfork,  
storm the castle.

SARAH

And yes, our other lordly family, yon Pruitts, on yon other hill.

Sarah chuckles as she sips and remembers.

SARAH

Calvin. Pru-itt. "If it moves, Pruitt'll screw it." The goat. So horny he'd screw the crack of dawn -- so it was said, not by me, of course --

And Sarah laughs again.

PETER

A mean streak -- you do --

SARAH

It's not mean to tell the truth --

PETER

The dead can't fire back.

SARAH

Even easier -- and sweeter. And you know I'm telling the truth.

PETER

Pruitt blew it -- that's the legacy.

SARAH

Pitied his wife --

PETER

Ah --

SARAH

You know what I'm saying -- having to bear all those kids. Nine?

PETER

Ten.

SARAH

Ten, that we know of. God, the poor woman's pelvis.

They sip.

SARAH

What is this? You just up for an evening of town Jeopardy?

PETER

Samuel Pruitt -- Sammy -- the last son, last of the ten. And then Katherine's husband, as you were saying.

Sarah refreshes their drinks.

SARAH

I can't remember his --

PETER

I couldn't either, so thus this mess. Cameron. Cameron Pruitt was the husband's name, the fifth of the ten.

SARAH

Cameron Pruitt and Kathleen Brixton. And twins. And Charles Brixton. All gone. To those who are gone. To long dead fires.

They toast.

SARAH

Which begs the question of. Why. All. This. For Cameron Pruitt and Kathleen Brixton. And the dead Charles Brixton. And the dead Calvin Pruitt.

Peter doesn't answer, stares at his glass.

SARAH

Fires do not die? Is that it?

Peter looks directly at Sarah.

PETER

And. Here. Is. Why. That is true.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 9

Twilight, with full moon in the sky. Isaiah enters his campground, using an LED flashlight to light his way. As the light moves across the ground, it finds Helios seated on one of the camp chairs, which gives Isaiah a start.

ISAIAH

It's not like they're not going to think about looking for you here.

HELIOS

You're a material witness. Turn off the light. It will help us think through this better.

Isaiah turns off the light. They sit in silence.

ISAIAH

Think what?

HELIOS

Are you choking yet?

ISAIAH

I don't understand.

HELIOS

Your disgust. I don't care about your disgust,  
but I want to know about your disgust.

ISAIAH

I don't feel any disgust.

HELIOS

You lie. The face --

ISAIAH

I wasn't here to find you -- I didn't come for  
you -- I didn't even know about --

HELIOS

The blessings of youth.

ISAIAH

I'm not that young anymore, so I don't get the  
blessings.

HELIOS

You never had much chance to be young -- properly  
young.

ISAIAH

Don't weep for me.

HELIOS

What was it like? After.

ISAIAH

It was horrible after.

HELIOS

Burnt wood in the wet grass, the air blinded by  
the smoke of sacrifices --

ISAIAH

That wasn't the horrible part --

Katherine appears, same flame-colored dress.

KATHERINE

Don't take it out on --

HELIOS

I'm not --

ISAIAH

Is she here? I want to see her.

HELIOS

You can't.

KATHERINE

Shared pain --

ISAIAH

I loved her, too --

HELIOS

Private pain.

Katherine puts her finger to her lips.

ISAIAH

My ass, private -- you want to know the horrible part --

HELIOS

Quiet. Quiet!

The stabs of a flashlight's light in the darkness, sound of footsteps. Helios melts away. Katherine dims.

Isaiah turns on his own flashlight.

ISAIAH

Who is it?

There is no answer, just the closer approach of the footsteps.

ISAIAH

Who is it?

Sarah comes in to view, breathing heavily. She and Isaiah look at each other in the flashlights.

ISAIAH

What?

SARAH

Do you have something I can sit on? I don't fancy rocks or dirt.

Isaiah pulls out the second camp chair, also pulls out an LED lantern and turns it on. Sarah sits.

SARAH

Can't toast a marshmallow over that thing.

ISAIAH

Don't want to be known for burning down the state forest.

SARAH

That's not what you'll be known for.

Sarah pulls a metal flask out of her pocket and takes a sip, offers it to Isaiah, who declines.

SARAH

At least not only that. Ah -- that hits the spot that needs to be hit.

Katherine becomes more visible. Sarah puts the flask away.

SARAH

No, that's not what you'll be known for, even if you do burn down Peter Waldo's property and everything around it. I heard you talking.

ISAIAH

How? You were crashing like a bear.

SARAH

I'll assume you mean that as a thing of prowess. I repeat, I heard you talking. Not Hannah Bartlett, clearly, and not to Peter Waldo, clearly --

ISAIAH

So? He's gone. What are you doing here?

SARAH

He's not gone -- well, maybe from --

Sarah speaks in a sarcastically loud voice.

SARAH

Our. Immediate. Vicinity.

Sarah cups her ears, as if waiting for a response, then laughs.

SARAH

But he's not gone -- Chief Bartlett's sign of the end-times is most definitely not gone.

ISAIAH

Then I'll go -- I'll go right now --

SARAH

Sit down and stop being dramatic.

KATHERINE

Samuel -- Sammy --

Isaiah stops. Sarah notices him staring into the middle distance.

SARAH

Someone else? I didn't hear --

ISAIAH

Sshh!

Isaiah listens intently.

ISAIAH

Please, again -- please, again -- again -- please  
--

Sarah watches Isaiah. Katherine goes to Isaiah and touches him on the cheek, then drifts away. Isaiah responds to the touch as if it were both electricity and divine comfort. He turns and turns looking for the source of the touch, but of course Katherine is gone -- and she is a ghost, after all.

Finally, Isaiah returns to the land of the living, notices Sarah watching him.

SARAH

There is already a dragnet out for Helios.  
Dragnet -- I don't even know if they use that  
word anymore, but whatever they use -- APB, BOLO  
-- they're doing it. Tromping through this  
forest pretty soon.

ISAIAH

You come to warn me?

SARAH

I'm concerned about the pain you're causing Peter  
Waldo.

ISAIAH

I don't even know the man.

SARAH

You hear about Charles Brixton? In all your  
trips to our public library, open to one and all?

Isaiah doesn't answer -- doesn't do anything. Sarah pulls out the flask, sips.

SARAH

I can wait.

Isaiah gestures for the flask. Sarah passes it to him. He sips,  
hands it back.

ISAIAH

What is that --

SARAH

Rye whiskey. Nobody drinks rye whiskey any more, which is why I drink it. What would that make you to Brixton?

ISAIAH

What?

SARAH

You heard me.

ISAIAH

I don't know who Brixton is.

SARAH

You do, you do, you do. This family relationship thing is tricky --

ISAIAH

Shut up.

SARAH

Whatever you were staring at is gone.

ISAIAH

I know! Shut up.

SARAH

Co-brother-in-law would be my choice. Helios!

Perhaps a faint echo.

SARAH

I know you'd know. Helios! A.k.a. --

Before Sarah can finish, Hannah's voice comes through a bullhorn. Suddenly, the darkness is alive with flashlights.

BARTLETT

Do. Not. Move.

Sarah stands up, hands in pockets. Bartlett tromps in, followed by Peter. Air crackles with radio chatter, lights bathe the campsite.

Hannah looks very tired.

BARTLETT

What the fuck are you doing here?

PETER

Sarah --

SARAH  
Hannah, I'm doing my part to retard your  
apocalypse.

BARTLETT  
Where is he?

ISAIAH  
I don't know.

BARTLETT  
He was here.

ISAIAH  
And then he left when she walked in.

Sarah shrugs her shoulders.

BARTLETT  
Anyone else show up for a chat? Beelzebub?  
Nostradamus?

Hannah pokes the flashlight into the tent, then looks around her. She  
brings the bullhorn to her mouth.

BARTLETT  
Fan out -- he's not here.

The lights disappear, footsteps walking away.

BARTLETT  
Are you all sensible that when Helios -- should I  
use his real name, but what the fuck does it  
matter? --

PETER  
Hannah --

BARTLETT  
Shut up. He took a service revolver with him.  
With bullets, in case you're wondering about his  
thoroughness. Now why would he do that?

ISAIAH  
I didn't see him holding it.

BARTLETT  
Because -- and this is just a feeling I fucking  
have -- people do not see what they do not want  
to see about him. Such love.

Hannah turns to Peter.

BARTLETT  
You're pretty quiet about all of this.

PETER

I've got a good right to be. Like anybody else,  
I wish the dead would stay dead.

BARTLETT

Let's hope that's all that happens. Just keep  
Charles Brixton in mind, Sammy.

Hannah stomps away.

ISAIAH

What did she mean by that?

PETER

I told you not to do anything.

SARAH

You're not my parents or my husband. If I had  
one.

PETER

We should get out of here. Men with guns are  
walking around in the dark.

SARAH

I don't want to go home.

PETER

Then we'll go to my house. And you're coming,  
you're not staying here.

ISAIAH

I have to wait for him.

PETER

You won't find him -- he will find you. He hides  
-- he seeks, you seek, he hides -- get it?

SARAH

Clever.

PETER

I'd do better if I weren't so --

SARAH

So what?

But Peter doesn't finish the sentence, just turns and goes, stabbing  
his flashlight into the dark. Sarah grabs Isaiah and pulls him along.  
Isaiah pulls back for a moment, turns off the lantern, then joins  
Sarah.

Katherine floats into the darkness, inexpressible sadness on her face.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Scene 10**

Light goes on. Helios in Peter's house, holding the gun on them as they enter. KATHLEEN is there as well. A simple living room: some chairs, a table, divan.

To one side are two ladders with a plank between them, about three feet up, dropcloth on the floor: Peter had been doing some plaster work on the wall.

HELIOS

It is time for the time of our resolutions.

But Peter doesn't respond with anything. He takes off his coat in a slow deliberate fashion, folds it over the chair back, straightens his clothes. Only then does he face Helios.

PETER

At least let them leave.

HELIOS

Can't.

PETER

I'm responsible for their safety.

HELIOS

And you're practiced at that sort of thing.

PETER

Used to be.

ISAIAH

What are you two talking about?

PETER

Can they at least sit down?

ISAIAH

What are you two --

HELIOS

Sit them down all you want -- but they don't leave.

Peter gestures, and Sarah sits down. Isaiah does not.

ISAIAH

I want to know --

Helios pivots ever so slightly with the gun. With his free hand, he makes a silver dollar appear -- a bit of sleight of hand to make it appear, then not appear -- then tosses it to Isaiah.

HELIOS  
For your pains.

ISAIAH  
You're cruel.

HELIOS  
Excellent tutorials.

ISAIAH  
You can have --

Isaiah goes to toss the coin back.

HELIOS  
Ah, ah, ah -- look at it.

Isaiah looks at it, and he softens -- just a bit, but enough to show.  
He speaks without rancor.

ISAIAH  
You bastard.

HELIOS  
But of a very specific lovable kind. Sit down.

Isaiah sits.

SARAH  
Lovable?

HELIOS  
Tell her.

ISAIAH  
A keepsake.

HELIOS  
I do have feelings.

SARAH  
What of him are you keeping sacred?

ISAIAH  
Life with a chance for [parole] --

HELIOS  
Sentimental-session over. It is time, I said,  
for the time, I said, of our resolutions.

PETER  
Is that what you said to Charles Brixton?

Gun pivots ever so slightly.

HELIOS

I didn't say anything to Charles Brixton.

PETER

That thing carrying bullets?

SARAH

Wondering the same.

HELIOS

Hard to tell, given the uncertain texture of the universe.

PETER

"Yes" or "no" is not uncertain.

HELIOS

As a great man once said, "The world's a hospital."

ISAIAH

Cam -- please --

HELIOS

Shut. Up.

A big theatrical sigh.

HELIOS

Are we all all knowing here?

PETER

About some of the past.

HELIOS

That's all anybody gets, even in the best of times slash worst of times. Let us banish the past tense --

PETER

It's not your past only.

HELIOS

Please.

ISAIAH

Cameron.

Helios turns his gaze to Isaiah.

HELIOS

Sam.

ISAIAH

Cameron --

HELIOS

Sammy.

ISAIAH

What are you doing?

HELIOS

I'm doing what I've come to do.

ISAIAH

I know why.

KATHERINE

He does, Cam --

ISAIAH

It's the same reason for me.

HELIOS

Not the same for you. At all.

KATHERINE

Cam, show him, show them all some mercy --

HELIOS

Mercy?! Mercy?!

Everyone is startled by the outburst, since it's not said directly to any of them. Helios does not drop his guard.

Katherine's response is equally unexpected: she screams out her words.

KATHERINE

Mercy! Mercy, Pity, Peace --

They stare at each other. Everyone else is frozen.

KATHERINE

Why are you teaching yourself to forget it all?

They hold their gaze. Helios speaks to the rest of them.

HELIOS

A hospital, did I say a great man said? A hospital -- when you think about it, the world is more like the jailhouse than the hospital. We're chained in place by our illusions --

KATHERINE

Don't add suffering to them --

HELIOS

-- hoping for the Great Lawyer's cleansing arrival -- are they following me?

To the three of them.

HELIOS

Are you following me?!

PETER

The gun --

Helios takes a deep breath. Katherine sits herself on the cross-plank.

HELIOS

But. At the end of it all -- instead of bail for the sufferants --

KATHERINE

Accident, Cameron --

HELIOS

-- pfft, the crush of fire against us, flames in our throats --

KATHERINE

Accident --

HELIOS

-- and the hands of strangers gloved in latex --

Sarah points at the gun.

SARAH

Peter --

PETER

Stop waving the gun.

HELIOS

Oh. Oh. An interruption. Am I waving it?

SARAH

Yes.

HELIOS

Oh. My. It seems to have a life of its own.

PETER

There is no one in this room who is an enemy.

HELIOS

Such confidence.

PETER

You painted "hope" on a courthouse.

ISAIAH

I didn't know you'd be here, when I came --

HELIOS

How did you hear?

PETER

The gun --

HELIOS

Oh, all right, Mr. Protector.

Helios places the gun in his lap, though still in his grip. He faces Isaiah.

HELIOS

Now -- how did you --

ISAIAH

Air is thick with -- data -- I smashed everything afterwards -- what was the point afterwards?

HELIOS

I didn't know I'd be here. I mean, where was I anyway, who was I, a nudnik, a nothing, and then --

Helios turns to Katherine.

HELIOS

I have to say to you all that I have been a little -- mad.

SARAH

Twenty years mad, Cameron Pruitt. Just to slip in something edgewise.

HELIOS

I still have business to do.

SARAH

Twenty years of madness is --

ISAIAH

Why are they here? They don't have anything to do with our --

HELIOS

Your cue -- and then I really must start the apocalypse countdown.

PETER

Not my story to tell, Cameron. Helios. Yours, his --

HELIOS

Peter Waldo is so -- humble.

PETER

You're the one who painted "hope." That makes it Katherine's, too.

Helios erupts, a volcanic cry of pain. Katherine matches his outburst, and they trade outbursts until it gets silly. She gestures for him to come close and sit beside her. He does. She lifts off the scar tissue, and for the moment they are young.

KATHERINE

I do.

Isaiah is in tears.

SARAH

You might as well say it.

PETER

Neither Charles Brixton nor Calvin Pruitt wanted the marriage.

Helios shrugs.

HELIOS

Eh.

PETER

Why?

HELIOS

Eh -- not interested. But Peter Waldo --

PETER

In those days I advised both families on planning their estates.

SARAH

Really?

PETER

Oh yes -- once upon a time I cut a wide figure.

HELIOS

So many skeletons rattling in closets.

PETER

Which I used to make sure neither of you, of them, were disinherited.

ISAIAH

You blackmailed my father?

PETER

Equal opportunity blackmailing, Sam, both sides.

HELIOS

For our love. For our hope.

Helios takes the scar tissue from Katherine's hands and replaces it.

PETER

To give them a chance to breathe.

SARAH

You old radical, you.

PETER

And prices to pay.

Helios rises, brandishes the gun again. Katherine wraps her arms around herself as if bound in a strait-jacket, loses all glow, all warmth.

ISAIAH

There's me, too -- you won't leave me out. What do you think it was like being the ten-year-old tail-end of the Pruitt line, with a father as old and dry as the moon? You were the most father I had, ever had -- Katherine was comfort.

SARAH

And then the fire -- is that right?

HELIOS

Ashes, ashes, all fall down.

ISAIAH

Stop it. Stop it. I had to go back to that --

PETER

It was Chief Bartlett who told me that Katherine had died -- in the same asylum they'd stuffed her away after the fire, the death of --

ISAIAH

I never stopped looking for her.

PETER

I never knew they'd done that.

SARAH

Talk about twenty years of madness --

PETER

Charles Brixton, another of his secrets, paying for her long slow tortured [death] --

HELIOS

Why should anything have changed him? Too much sentiment, Peter Waldo --

Isaiah kneels by Katherine's suffering, shivering, unresponsive body and gazes at her with great sadness. Helios watches them. This can take as long as it needs.

HELIOS

The universe -- not hospital, not jailhouse -- not asylum, even -- it's a machine-gun -- bam bam bam bam bam -- you build, build, build, but the cats eat the birds in the birdhouses and the fires eat the faces of the innocent and stupid alike -- go -- go! --

Helios gets Isaiah to rise and go back to his chair.

HELIOS

-- and nothing is left but bones and ashes, otherwise known as the soul. She's dead. She's dead. She's dead. Are we now done with the maudlin and memory?

Katherine unwinds herself into the luminescent Katherine, stands on the plank.

PETER

And you? Might as well ask you the same question, Sam.

ISAIAH

I'm not dead. I'm not giving up.

HELIOS

Ah, youth these days -- so ungrateful with all their "hope." Don't understand irony at all.

SARAH

What was the coin? The coin you gave him -- he gave you?

HELIOS

This is all enough.

ISAIAH

Magic tricks -- what ten-year-old kid doesn't love magic tricks? Love his brother for magic --

The gun, which had disappeared for a while, now re-appears -- steady.

HELIOS

Are we done?

PETER

Cameron?

HELIOS

Helios.

PETER

What happened with Charles Brixton?

HELIOS

Nothing.

PETER

According to the police report --

HELIOS

Tyranny of data.

PETER

-- it wasn't long after Brixton died that you showed up painting "hope" on the courthouse. Using a can of aluminum roof-paint ordered especially for --

HELIOS

Like all tyrannies, data must be resisted.

With one hand, Helios pulls plastic handcuffs out of his pocket. He gives two of them to Peter.

HELIOS

Useful stuff at a police station. Her, behind the back, to the ladder. Him, behind the back.

Peter cuffs Sarah, then Isaiah.

ISAIAH

Why --

HELIOS

Be grateful. Now you.

There is a moment as Peter decides whether he should resist or not, and Helios knows this, sees this.

HELIOS

The original Peter Waldo would never taint his soul with violence.

PETER

He did believe in justice.

HELIOS

Which protected him like a fart.

PETER

True.

Helios points the gun at Sarah.

HELIOS

So, will it be blood or gratitude on your hands today?

Still, Peter is not compliant.

HELIOS

You want to say something to him?

SARAH

I run his office, I don't run him -- I'd like to keep it that way.

HELIOS

Sit.

Peter puts his hands behind his back and sits, and Helios cuffs him to the chair. Gun is back in his hand.

HELIOS

You two will figure out how to release yourselves before long, so I don't have much time left. Apocalypse can be so demanding!

Helios leaves, pulling Isaiah along. Katherine drifts away.

SARAH

Got any sharp instruments on you?

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 11

In Peter's basement. Helios sits Isaiah down, tucks the gun in his pants, starts gathering materials: wood, cloth, and so on.

ISAIAH

What are you doing? What are you doing?!

HELIOS

I have to meet my confessor --

ISAIAH

Stop it. Stop it!

Isaiah begins crying. Helios stops, but he looks more annoyed than compassionate.

HELIOS

Let me add in my "stop it."

ISAIAH

I'm sorry. It's like you have no heart.

Helios goes back to picking up materials.

ISAIAH

No memory.

HELIOS

You're still ten years old.

ISAIAH

You should try it.

HELIOS

You wouldn't want my first decade.

ISAIAH

Do you even know what they did with her body?

This brings Helios up short.

ISAIAH

You couldn't do anything about that, could you?  
No magic for that.

HELIOS

The body's nothing.

ISAIAH

Then why come back at all?

HELIOS

It wasn't to taste the ashes again.

Helios begins packing up the materials and some tools.

ISAIAH

Then why?

HELIOS

Why did you?

ISAIAH

Because I was thick with grief -- I can't help  
it. And because I was hoping you would come.

HELIOS

Definitely ten years old. I have to go.

ISAIAH

Are you even glad to see me?

HELIOS

What -- you want to save my soul?

ISAIAH

Yes -- of course, Cam -- if not both, at least one. Of course.

This strikes Helios as incredibly absurd and deeply touching.

ISAIAH

You should turn yourself in. Peter will help --

HELIOS

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood -  
-

ISAIAH

What? What?

HELIOS

Peter has done his lifting. He owes no more, he pays no more. Besides, although he and Hannah Bartlett were once -- in -- love -- after tonight, that will carry no weight with her about me.

ISAIAH

I can't follow --

HELIOS

It doesn't matter --

ISAIAH

Turn yourself in.

HELIOS

That's your offer? Your big redemption? Remember, like a great big machine gun.

ISAIAH

Then after, you and I can --

Helios makes the sound and movement of a machine gun.

HELIOS

Spend your time where it counts the most, brother of mine. And that is not on me. Now, I do have to go.

Helios grabs his materials and tools, turns to go.

ISAIAH

You are still worth it, Cam.

HELIOS

Without Katherine? Seriously?

ISAIAH

Yes.

HELIOS

For years it's been just brute habit, Sammy, and the pleasure that comes from being mean. The hint half guessed, the gift half understood -- like I said.

Helios turns to leave. Isaiah scuttles after him. Helios turns, gun in hand -- it moves around.

HELIOS

Oh my, look how it waves around -- you really should stay still.

And with that, Helios is really gone. Isaiah stares at his absence.

ISAIAH

Katherine. Katherine.

But Katherine is not there. And Isaiah knows this.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 12

The Presbyterian Church at midnight -- a dim light over the entrance. A wooden ladder as the pulpit, a single chair as a pew.

On the sidewalk is a hopscotch diagram.

Hannah, in uniform, with her holstered gun, pulls out what looks like an invitation and reads it under the light.

BARTLETT

"Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace: A Confab" -- yeah? Well, fuck you, Helios.

Hannah shoves the invitation back into her pocket.

BARTLETT

And in a church -- a fucking church. Fuck. You. Yeah. That feels good.

Hannah steps into the cool darkness.

In the dimness she can see the dark hump of the pulpit. Hannah tries to calm her breathing.

**SOUND: An enormous WHOOSH!**

Hannah raises her hands to protect her face, perhaps even lets out a small sharp cry. Then it's gone.

Hannah slaps her holster, comes up empty-handed.

BARTLETT

Son-of-a -- son-of-a-bitch!

Almost immediately, a stirring from the pulpit, and a resonant voice, full of anger and pride, leaps out.

HELIOS

So -- you have arrived.

Hannah, startled, slides into the pew.

HELIOS

Pay attention! We have much to discuss.

BARTLETT

There's nothing to discuss.

HELIOS

We share two murders.

BARTLETT

We don't share a thing -- wait, two --

HELIOS

Truth is always the first to suffer. Then why are you here?

BARTLETT

To arrest you. You said "two."

HELIOS

Do you think Charles Brixton exited his wretched life of his own accord? You have the paint.

BARTLETT

No sign of trauma.

HELIOS

You can scare people to death. You can shout death into the ears of a defunct old man.

BARTLETT

Heart attack, said the EMTs.

HELIOS

An attack of the heart will do that. What would your men think about doe-eyed Hannah Bartlett sitting here, with me, alone, in the dark? Or former lover Peter Waldo? What is the truth, Hannah?

BARTLETT

If you're a murderer --

HELIOS  
Is that what fascinates you about me?

BARTLETT  
I'm not fascinated, I'm just --

HELIOS  
Liar, liar, pants on fire.

BARTLETT  
It's important to know --

HELIOS  
Liar, liar --

BARTLETT  
-- the criminal mind --

HELIOS  
-- pants on fire -- especially when there's a  
thrill to be enjoyed for the knowing, when the  
criminal may be the one wearing the uniform.

Hannah jumps up, angry -- indistinguishable from being excited.

BARTLETT  
That's stupid! You said two --

Hannah moves toward the pulpit.

BARTLETT  
I am not responsible for you --

**SOUND: Another enormous WHOOSH!**

Hannah drops to her knees, shielding her face. Whatever it is whizzes past.

Helios's voice booms from another part of the church. Hannah crouches like a fighter.

Helios snaps on a flashlight held under his chin, his face swathed in nylon. The upward light paints him a complete ghoul.

HELIOS  
Try your holster.

Hannah pulls out a flashlight.

HELIOS  
I constantly astound you, don't I?

BARTLETT  
You sicken me.

HELIOS

Pants on fire. Turn it on, hold it like mine --  
and remember who has your gun. Guns.

Wreathed in darkness, they square off with the flashlights under their  
chins. Shadows leap to the vaulted ceiling.

BARTLETT

What do you want with me?

HELIOS

To humiliate you, your regime.

BARTLETT

You've done a pretty good job of that.

Step by careful step, Helios moves toward Hannah.

HELIOS

Soon you will lose everything -- and then you and  
I will be even closer.

BARTLETT

You broke the law.

HELIOS

I don't care about the law. I want to humiliate  
the law. I care about justice.

BARTLETT

Justice!

HELIOS

That puzzles you. I tell you about Charles  
Brixton, and I show not one sign of remorse.

Helios stands close to Hannah.

HELIOS

It's the monsters that make us pay attention.

Helios reaches out with his left hand to touch Hannah on the cheek,  
just hovers the fingertips without touching.

HELIOS

I have nothing left to lose, and that gives me  
complete freedom. Doesn't Hannah Bartlett ache  
for the same freedom from the law, from  
obligation, from "should" and "have to"?

Hannah's head inclines toward Helios's hand, as if to lay her cheek in  
his palm and give over to his offer.

HELIOS

Aren't you feeling blood crash through parts of  
your body you thought had died?

Hannah grabs Helios's wrist and pulls -- and out of the sleeve pops a  
fake hand.

At the same instant, Helios pops off his flashlight and the pulpit  
geysers out a plume of smoke.

Hannah spins to look at the pulpit, when she whirls back, Helios has  
disappeared like the smoke from the pulpit. Hannah's stabbing  
flashlight beam finds nothing.

Hannah moves toward the pulpit.

BARTLETT

I know you're still here!

At the pulpit, Hannah waves away the smoke. She puts down the rubber  
hand, picks up a wooden box wrapped in heavy rope, and shakes it: a  
loud clunk.

Hannah exits the church, carrying the wooden box, the fake hand, and  
the flashlight.

Outside the church, Hannah kneels and, using a pocket knife, cuts  
through the rope. She opens the box and pulls out her gun, which she  
holsters, then puts the hand in the wooden box.

Hannah scouts around her, then stares at the sidewalk. She notices  
the hopscotch diagram.

She picks up a stone and pitches it into the first box.

She begins to hop.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Scene 13

Police station. Hannah, box under her arm, joins Peter, Sarah, and  
Isaiah.

BARTLETT

Are you all all right?

SARAH

He must have known we wouldn't take that long --  
the kitchen, a knife -- voila!

BARTLETT

Yeah, well, a regular jokester is our Helios -- a  
real crack-up artist. Want to see what my  
evening was like?

Hannah opens the wooden box and takes out the rubber hand.

BARTLETT

Sixty-five, getting ready to retire, and this is my tribute.

Hannah waves it around like a baton.

BARTLETT

Rah, rah, rah.

ISAIAH

How did --

Hannah pulls out the invite, hands it to Peter, who scans it.

BARTLETT

Mayor will take everything away when he finds out that I was having a confab with a known criminal in a fucking --

PETER

Hannah --

BARTLETT

-- church --

Hannah grabs the invite and throws it down, throws down the hand. Isaiah picks up the invite, looks at it, hands it to Sarah.

BARTLETT

-- shut up -- Presbyterian, and I'm a fucking Methodist -- a confab --

SARAH

About what?

PETER

Sarah -- Hannah, look --

BARTLETT

Can't you read?

SARAH

But about what?

PETER

Sarah --

SARAH

Why are you so angry, Hannah? Peter, stop. The man -- Helios, or Cameron Pruitt, or whatever you want to call him --

BARTLETT

Fucker --

SARAH

He is in anguish. Anguish.

Sarah points to Isaiah.

SARAH

Ask him -- he probably knows better than any of us.

BARTLETT

That gets him a pass?

SARAH

I don't know what it gets him.

BARTLETT

Show me somebody who isn't in anguish --

SARAH

It should still get him something.

BARTLETT

Should I give your brother a pass? Have you given him a pass? He broke the law!

SARAH

And who of us has entirely clean hands, Hannah? Especially if you have a rubber one?

Sarah giggles.

SARAH

I'm sorry, Hannah -- I couldn't help it -- it's been a strange night --

PETER

Hannah -- Sarah, put it down --

SARAH

Rah, rah.

But Sarah puts it down.

PETER

Hannah, listen to me -- how will the Mayor know you were even there?

This brings Hannah up short.

BARTLETT

What?

PETER

How will anyone know you were there, except for us?

BARTLETT

You want me to lie?

PETER

Did I say that?

Hannah puts the box down, stares at it.

BARTLETT

I told you he was the sign of the apocalypse.

PETER

Hannah -- Hannah -- what is the apocalypse but what we already know is coming?

BARTLETT

They'll ask me to investigate.

PETER

So investigate. Hoodlums.

SARAH

Hoodlums.

BARTLETT

He said he didn't care about the law. He wanted to humiliate the law. That he cared about justice.

Katherine glides in, unseen, of course -- except that Isaiah senses something in the room.

BARTLETT

What was he like, your brother?

ISAIAH

What?

BARTLETT

What was he like?

ISAIAH

My brother? A prince, my brother -- to me, to Katherine.

BARTLETT

Law-breaker?

ISAIAH

No -- not Cam -- unless you call having a big heart the same thing. He took me in. They took me in. Cam was Cam because Katherine was Katherine. They were the right family for me, for each other.

BARLETT

Was he like that -- they like that?

PETER

Why do you think I did what I did?

BARTLETT

And then he kills Charles Brixton.

PETER

No evidence of that.

BARTLETT

He was there.

PETER

We don't know anything about what happened there.

BARTLETT

And now he's saying that it's the monsters that make us pay attention. I'm sixty-five and ready to lie my way into retirement -- maybe he's right. Brixton was a monster for sure --

PETER

Katherine deserved better.

SARAH

And then he paints hope on courthouse. Talk about the futile gesture.

ISAIAH

Wasn't.

SARAH

Convince me.

Hannah stares at the box, the hand, the invitation.

BARTLETT

What is it that we really know? Eh?

Helios enters, gun in hand, and Hannah pulls her revolver. Helios is tilting crazily as if his shoes were nailed to the floor. He wears a crazy smile and his face is slick with tears.

PETER

Hannah!

BARTLETT

Shut up. Put it down.

Helios holds the gun and does a funny wave with his hands as if to say that he is surrendering, but Katherine bends his arm down so that the gun points toward the group.

BARTLETT

Don't. Don't.

Helios gives Katherine a smile. Katherine smiles back.

KATHERINE

Soon, love.

Katherine moves away. Helios goes back to his mad dance, and at some point, one of his gestures becomes too threatening, and Hannah shoots him through the heart.

Hannah kneels by the body.

BARTLETT

(without rancor)

You fucker.

Hannah looks at the three of them.

BARTLETT

First time I ever fired the goddamn thing in the line of service. First goddamn time.

What else is there to say?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **Scene 14**

Peter, in funeral garb, stands. Beside him is Isaiah.

PETER

What a gorgeous day.

ISAIAH

I put in a special request.

PETER

To whom?

ISAIAH

Just let it fly up and out.

PETER

Seemed to work.

ISAIAH

We're free to believe whatever we want.

PETER

No -- but yes.

They stand in silence.

ISAIAH

You noticed no one came from either family.

PETER

Then they aren't family.

ISAIAH

Who was left but us to come here today?

PETER

"Paying respects" -- what an odd phrase.

ISAIAH

The two side by side. Can get what he wanted.

PETER

If you don't laugh, the grief will kill you.

ISAIAH

Blessed are the meek.

PETER

They are going to need it.

ISAIAH

Even if you do laugh, it can kill you.

PETER

Amen.

ISAIAH

Amen.

They turn away to leave.

PETER

If you want, you can build something out there.  
I'll get you the permits. You can be Thoreau by  
the pond.

ISAIAH

It's worth a thought. Wait, wait, I'm thinking  
that thought.

PETER

Let me know when you're done with it.

ISAIAH

Wait, wait -- thought I had the answer. It's going to take a little while longer.

PETER

Just thought I'd offer.

ISAIAH

It won't be for now -- other parts to see first. Maybe later.

Sarah comes in, takes Peter's hand.

SARAH

You off?

ISAIAH

I think so. Think I have to be. Though he did offer me a cabin by the pond.

SARAH

Because that's what he's always wanted.

ISAIAH

So why not?

PETER

No good answer.

ISAIAH

Find one.

The three of them look at each other, at a loss for words. Isaiah finally nods and turns to go. Sarah puts a hand on his arm, smiles. Peter smiles. Isaiah leaves.

Sarah and Peter look at each other, look back at where the graves would be.

Lights to black.